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**HELPs TO HOLINESS ;**  
**OR, RULES OF**  
**FASTING, ALMSGIVING, AND PRAYER.**



# HELPS TO HOLINESS;

OR, RULES OF

FASTING, ALMSGIVING, AND PRAYER,

INTENDED SPECIALLY FOR USE IN LENT.

BY THE

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TO THE VERY REVEREND  
RICHARD WILLIAM CHURCH,  
DEAN OF S. PAUL'S,  
CALLED AFTER A LONG RETIREMENT  
TO FULFIL THE BEAUTIFUL PROMISE OF HIS YOUTH,  
I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE VOLUME,  
IN MEMORY  
OF S. MARY'S, OXFORD, ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS,  
AND THE  
*Unforgotten Voice*  
WE THERE HEARD TOGETHER,  
FOR WHOSE ECHO WE SHALL LISTEN WHEN THE STRIFE OF TONGUES  
IS PASSING FROM OUR EARS.



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## MAN'S DUTY TO HIMSELF.

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### FASTING.

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WHEN our dear Lord taught the multitudes how to fast, He began by insisting on the grace of cheerfulness. He did not bid them to fast, as a new commandment, but assumed that they would do so. Ethical teachers and physicians of the body had long since accustomed the pagan world to the excellent uses of fasting: and the Church of Israel had received a ritual of the same, as part of the system of worship revealed to Moses, according to the pattern shown him on the Mount. Jesus knew that his brethren would fast, as surely as they would give alms and pray: but He bade them change the natural element of this penitential discipline into the new wine of the Christian life, by infusing the grace of love and cheerfulness. "When ye fast, be

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not of a sad countenance. When thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face."

And on Ash Wednesday we do well to bear this counsel of cheerfulness in mind. In starting on a new course of devotion we need encouragement. The beginning of Lent is to many a time of fear and deep depression. It is not sorrow, as on Good Friday, which brings a refreshing sweetness and contrition to the soul. Nor is there, as on Good Friday, an Object lifted up outside of us but near us, to draw our hearts towards It, and take us upward beyond ourselves. The very Cross is in shade to-day. It is there, but the veil of our sins is thick upon its face. It is not so much the living loving Saviour we see, as the hard bare Cross. And the Voice is dumb, that we have heard aforetime crying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The eye that won Peter to penitence, and broke his heart; that drew the Magdalene through the crowd, and constrained her to expect a loving grace and absolution from her sins; that searched the conscience of the thief upon his cross, and opened a vision of Paradise to his weary eyes—that eye is downcast on us to-day! Jesus, if I may say so, for these dry hours

leaves us to ourselves! We are sent back to our own cell, solitary, silent, hungry, cold, with a dry hard sense of sin pressing on the brain, our hand upon the skull of our own sins, and broken vows, like dead men's bones, lying round about us in the dust, waiting for the Spirit of contrition to make the flesh gather to them again. It is we who must bring to the bar our own life to be judged, and the judgment seat we set up hard by the faldstool where we kneel. And none else do we meet there but those we have sinned with or sinned against. On Good Friday it is the pierced Hand of One, bleeding with love, that sheds His own pain over us, and offers us His cup of sorrow, sweetened by His own lips, that we may drink our portion with Him, and "fill up that which is behind" of His afflictions in our flesh. True, our spirit is dark; but in the shadow of His anguish, which falls upon our soul, there is light: and in the light of His Penitence and Sacrifice we see light even in our dull repentance. But now we are alone with the burden, not always the *sorrow*, of our sins. With our own hand we sprinkle ashes on our head, and ashes are cold, dead things, and speak miserably of fires that are extinct! And are not those ashes often the image of our own Ash Wednesday hearts?

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Again, if we begin well, we fear how we may continue to the end of forty days. Three days of a retreat, twelve hours of fasting and prayer, experience of these brief devotions tells us how soon the spirit of perseverance sinks. But forty days of discipline, irritating us many times each day, six weeks of longer prayer, and the numerous temptations, too vexing to count, provoking us to break our Lenten resolutions—how can we face this prospect and not enter another Lent in fear?

Nor is it ourselves only we distrust. But to those, who wish to make another effort to use the occasion well, a man's foes are oftentimes those of his own household. One will make remarks, one will praise, one will misjudge, all do equal mischief to the placid temper which ministers to prayer. And, besides, by making a Lenten resolution, we give a challenge to the Devil: and if with nerve and boldness we smite him full upon the face, as we do whenever we offer a resolution to God, we may be sure he has resentment, and mighty vengeance too, and by-and-by he will recover himself and turn and rend us.

Well then, we need encouragement. Let us take it from the lips of our dear Lord. He assumes it for a fact, that his disciples intend to fast. But, providing

for their trouble, He bids them beforehand enter upon the task in cheerfulness and hope. "When ye fast, be not of a sad countenance." "When thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face." You *must* be bright and happy, not only for Christ's sake, that you may adorn His doctrine; not only that the world, seeing your good works in the light of a simple, loving, joyous atmosphere, may at once acknowledge that they are the fruit of grace, and give the glory of them to your Father Which is in heaven; but for your own sakes, that you may be light-hearted, and bear your Lenten burden easily, and not imagine that you are doing an eccentric thing for a Christian man and woman to do, and that you may run with patience the race that is set before you, and persevere unto the end. "If the Lord had not helped me, it had not failed but my soul had been put to silence; but when I said my foot hath slipped, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, Thy comforts have refreshed my soul."

I. The discipline expressed by fasting seems to the beginner to be made up only of ingenious checks, petty rules, trifling but irritating self-denials, and vexatious infringements of liberty, and therefore of all Christian duties it is the one, to which a soul of pious disposition,

but uneducated in the system of the Church, is most averse. Many think it a mechanical pressure, or a practice likely to produce a narrow mind, or a ceremony verging on formalism, or a superfluous rule, and one that can rarely be carried out in any ordinary home without offending the higher law of charity. And specially do some godly people resent its intrusion as an ungenial restraint on Christian liberty, and an exercise likely to engender a self-consciousness and scrupulousness alien to the gospel life.

But consider on the other hand the place it holds in the doctrine of our Blessed Lord. It there represents one third portion of the whole duty of man. Prayer comprehends our duty to God: almsgiving our duty to our neighbour: fasting a man's duty to himself. Now, considering how in modern ages of the English Church until the last forty years, while prayer has been acknowledged as a supreme duty among all religious men, and almsgiving has also been very generally received as an obligation on Christians, though rather as philanthropy than an offering to God, fasting has been almost as universally ignored, it is necessary to restore this discipline to its right position, as set by our Blessed Lord on an equality with almsgiving and prayer.

Our whole life is comprised within these terms. There are but three persons (excepting the Angels, whose communion with us is veiled in mystery) to whom a man stands in spiritual relations—God, his brother, and himself. And his spiritual enemies are also three: the Devil who tempts him to break his obligation to God, the world that perverts his duty to his brothers, and the flesh which incites him to destroy his own eternal life. And against these enemies Christ ordains these defences, devotion to God, love to man, discipline exercised towards himself. These you may distinguish, rightly dividing the word: but in fact they are inseparable. You conceive of no man right and true in his duty to God, and at the same time false to his brother or himself: nor can any fulfil his duty to his fellowman, if he be untrue to himself or God. In like manner, following this law of organised life, prayer, almsgiving, and fasting stand and fall together. Their association in our Saviour's teaching is no positive and arbitrary law, but a moral necessity. In the full sense of the words, you cannot pray except you fast and give alms: nor can you have charity to your neighbour except you fast and pray. By enumerating these duties singly, you may describe what a man does,

but only by the three together is it determined what he is.

II. Hence occur the frequent notices in Scripture of the mutual support which these three duties render to one another. In the Sermon on the Mount they form one clause of our Saviour's teaching; and His hearers there were used to this precept: "Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness."<sup>1</sup> "Be not faint-hearted when thou makest thy prayer, and neglect not to give alms."<sup>2</sup> S. Paul in his own person joins "watchings and fastings."<sup>3</sup> "David besought God for the child, and David fasted, and went in and lay all night upon the earth."<sup>4</sup> Nehemiah "sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."<sup>5</sup> The practice of the apostles was the same: "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Paul, and when they had fasted and prayed, they sent them away."<sup>6</sup> David, the model of penitence, says: "I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer returned into my own bosom."<sup>7</sup> And holy Daniel gives us this rule for Lent: "I set my

<sup>1</sup> Tobit xii. 8.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Sam. xii. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. xxxv. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ecclus. vii. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Nehem. i. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. xxxv. 18.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Acts xiii. 2, 3,

face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession.”<sup>1</sup> Anna “served God with fastings and prayers.”<sup>2</sup> The Angel told Cornelius, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.”<sup>3</sup> Remember especially this memorable word of our Blessed Lord: “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”<sup>4</sup> Nor can any better expression of the unity of almsgiving and fasting be found than in S. James: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”<sup>5</sup>

Among the Fathers you meet with such notices as these: “If you would exercise fasting before God with a placid temper, let us be continually in prayer.” “The burning arrows of the devil are quenched by the cold of fastings and watchings.” “Fasting and alms help prayer.” “Prayer is the refreshment of fasting. As bread without drink is dry, so fasting will not satisfy the soul without prayer.” As a link between almsgiving and prayer we find intercession; and the

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<sup>1</sup> Dan. ix. 3, 4.<sup>2</sup> S. Luke ii. 37.<sup>3</sup> Acts x. 4.<sup>4</sup> S. Matt. xvii. 21.<sup>5</sup> S. James i. 27.

prophets' rule to break bread for the hungry, if we would fast acceptably before God, is a natural transition from fasting to the giving of alms; so that, speaking briefly, it may be said that prayer can neither be exercised without the self-discipline and rigour which is included in fasting, nor without the charity which is expressed by almsgiving. And this for two reasons.

III. The two chief hindrances of prayer are these, *viz* :—

*Sin*.—You cannot pray as long as there is sin in you, sin unconfessed, unrepented of, and unforgiven: no more than medicine can heal the body, so long as the point of the barbed arrow cleaves to the wound, or even so much as a thorn, broken short off, lies buried in the flesh. Do you not complain that you cannot pray? The hindrances of prayer are many; and to overcome them you may need the counsel of a discreet director, or a patient study of the lives of saints. None know these difficulties so well as those who are striving to lead a saintly life. But if you be wise, nay if you be honest, you will not waste time in fetching about for a more subtle cause of poverty in prayer, until you have settled the question whether you have made a true confession

of your sins to God. This is the first intention of the Lenten fast.

Again, prayer is hindered by evil thoughts, and simply wandering thoughts, by vile temptations, and mean temptations, which degrade the soul, so that it dare not look up unveiled in the face of God, and pray. Such hindrances to prayer, though by no means abolished, are surely restrained by the severe discipline of the soul prescribed by fasting. In the hours of abstinence, when the soul truly fasts from sin and prays, a spiritual charm is thrown even over the unconverted powers of the world outside, and heavenly watchers aid us with their sympathy. When Daniel, the ascetic, was shut up within those bare hard walls, even Darius the king went to his palace and passed the night fasting, and "God sent His angels and shut the lions' mouths." So has the Creator of our marvellous nature mercifully ordained that those delicate springs contrived to work invisibly within the wondrous mechanism of our being, which, if touched by the malice of the enemy, can set in motion engines of torture, to rack every nerve and joint within us, may be reversed in their operation by forces equally subtle, and more within our own control. Thus Memory, that pitiless avenger of a sullied youth,

which has once dallied with the pleasures of sin for a season—memory, the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched—and Imagination, which can inflame with passions, while there is no incentive immediately before the eye—these baneful enemies, Memory the Fury, and Imagination the Siren, may be overcome by fasting, and reduced to minister to the power of prayer.

*Uncharitableness.*—Prayer is also made impossible by an unforgiving temper towards those who sin against us. Of the seven petitions of His Prayer, one only elicits from the Divine Master a note of exhortation, and that is the one which deals with charity. Our Blessed Lord deliberately pauses on the point, first, because of all moral virtues which He taught, forgiveness of injuries was the newest, the least known to the ethical systems of the world: and, secondly, because it is the hardest for a man thoroughly to exercise in the spirit of the law of love. And yet, without it, in vain does a disciple ask His Master to teach him how to pray. Thus does Almsgiving, which is charity, remove the disability which hinders prayer.

IV. It has been shown how these three duties interlace, and form the texture of the Christian life. But prejudice is an inveterate enemy, and if it does

less to ruin souls than passion and the world, it does quite as much as these to diminish the number of the saints. And yet by-and-by what will prejudice appear to be, when brought face to face with the judgment of the Mind of God? The public opinion of a century, the negligence of a few generations, the shibboleths of a thousand sects and heresies, these will not get so much as a hearing when the Lord returns to His Church on earth. "O let not the simple go away ashamed, but let the poor and needy give praise unto Thy Name." If men will be holy, they must be teachable. They must release their mind from those vexing and litigious scruples, which, especially in persons of a fastidious taste, prejudice the mind against minute attention to the details of the Christian life, for fear they lose the symmetry, and form, and beauty, and proportion of the faith.

In answer to these fears, I might ask if it were likely that so many saints in all ages of the Church would have upheld the tradition of these inseparable duties of the Apostolic life, had it been less than the mind of Christ which taught them. Or I might leave the question to be absolutely decided by the impartial sympathy expressed by our Blessed Lord with these three spiritual exercises, and by the example of His

own most holy life. But, besides this, you have *experience*. I would have you seriously inquire whether in fact you do not know instances where the harmony of the character is sadly marred, and the growth of the soul dwarfed and stunted, and painful eccentricities and miserable unreality discover themselves in persons undeniably religious.

For instance, one is "devout," as the phrase is, emotional, loving the Blessed Sacrament, quick in spiritual imagination; but the victim of besetting faults and sins, egotistical, consumed by vanity, feeding upon the sweetmeats of praise, angling for adulation, soft, with no backbone, self-indulgent, having neither the severity of judgment nor the simplicity of love. The key to such a man's incongruous life is that he attends to prayer, and is negligent of fasting. He would be a saint, if he would make this his rule, "I refrain my soul, and keep it low."

Then you see a woman, self-denying, almost rigid, loving penances, scrupulous, tight-bound with petty rules, painstaking, with a true courage for bearing hardness and pain; doing all the external and many of the interior works of fasting; but her temper is all wrong. She is peevish, sullen, selfish, jealous, inconsiderate, proud. She fails in almsgiving.

Again, the Church (especially in an age like ours, which is fruitful in men of action, benevolence, contention, and zeal), produces a character strongly marked by virtue, conscientious, punctual, laborious, full of activity, kind, generous, and brave. But somehow he does not "adorn the doctrine :" he is not *inspiring* ; there is a lack of grace and unction in him : he may be eloquent—if eloquent, he will be unreal : or he may be prosaic, and then his silver and gold will have no lustre of charity. Such a man is wanting in reverence, and the silent waiting in adoration outside the veil of mystery ; he has none of that upward gazing, which makes the soul cry out, "Oh that I had wings ! " "Whom have I in heaven but Thee ?" He would not have understood David ; he would have sent in the servant to disturb David in his penitence at every meal-time for those seven days that he lay in the dust before God. Such a man's works are good, but they are not done in light, and they do not win men's hearts to glorify God. The secret of his mistake is that he is not a man of prayer, and so you cannot give him your confidence. You dare not commit yourself to him. If you could know what he was doing when he said his prayers, you would see that he was talking to himself, and not to God. Such a man does not

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pray, and so long as he does not, he will never be a saint.

Surely it is wonderful how few *saints* there are! Must not angels think it stranger that so few godly persons attain to holiness, than that so many unconverted abide still in darkness? The reason is not far to find. Christian people, through wilfulness or more often indolence, are eclectics: they choose fragments piecemeal of the spiritual life: and as no eclectic in theology will ever be a theologian, so no eclectic in the religious life will ever become a Saint. Oh how it will enhance the dignity of your work, if you will believe that the intention of every precept in detail is to form in you the life-like image of Jesus Christ! The culture of each branch is to promote the development in true lines of beauty of the perfect tree. The hewn stones are brought together in parts by various hands, that the building may rise in symmetry after one ideal, into a temple unto the Lord. You can no more portray on canvass a lively image of the man, except you employ together and with one intent form, light and shade, and colour, than you can reproduce the life of the Apostolic Saint, without fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. The Holy Spirit works by one plan. One

mind rules through every member of the Body of Christ: and as a Latin writer has gracefully expressed it, "unius animæ non potest esse nisi una intentio," "one soul can have but one intention." Your one intention, (is it not so?) is to grow like-minded to Christ, by Whose grace you are saved. Despise not then the details of that growth, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The great Creator worked thus, elaborating with the patience of a perfect art the mechanism of each individual character, in the works of His Almighty Hands. "God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth, and it was so."<sup>1</sup> Be there in you also, if you desire holiness, a patient, pains-taking culture of every portion of the soul: but all the while a single intention of the whole life to grow into the likeness of Christ and His Saints.

With one eye we look unto God. With one desire we seek to be at one with Him. Gathering in our senses from the multitudinous interests of human life, we offer ourselves, one offering, to Him. The world

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis i. 11.

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becomes to us, as to the dying, an objectless wilderness, with one Presence only revealed to us, and that above us. And our heart utters one thought, "Thou, God, seest me." We retire from the manifold teachings of the Catholic Church, its visions, and doctrines, and sacraments, and communion with the saints, and lift up our eyes from our watchings, and fastings, and almsgivings, and prayers, and see "no man save Jesus only," and, if we love Him, we desire to be like Him. If we strive not to be like Him, then we love Him not. And in the privacy of our inner light, we interpret the heavenly meaning of all the earthly temptations, trials, experiences, and providences, with which our path is traversed along the narrow way, reading in them all God's one intention and one will, that we should come "in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

## CHAPTER II.

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### FASTING.

It is not uncommon to speak of the Epistles as being difficult, and the Gospels comparatively easy. But is this the fact? There are things harder to comprehend than the sequel of an argument through the maze of parentheses, or the harmony of the Gospel with the law of Moses, and of spiritual worship with the Eucharistic ritual of the Christian Church, or the chronology of the missionary journeys of S. Paul. It is harder, I mean, for an honestly determined Christian to harmonise Christ's precepts of self-denial, meekness, humility, abstinence from all love of comfort and wealth, with his duties to his family, business, society, and the customs of a modern English home, than to follow the Apostle's view of predestination and election in his eleventh chapter to the Romans. In the interpretation of our Blessed Saviour's counsels we are the victims of tradition

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and mild enthusiasts for moderation. As men lend their ears to the charming philosophers, who professedly translate theology into ethics, but whose effect it is to bring down revelation to the level of our common sense, and eliminate all mystery from the Word of God; so with fond attention we give a ready welcome to any interpreter, who will suggest a good reason for believing, that the severe counsels and absolute commands of our Blessed Lord mean to the Christian of the Established Church of England less by half, than they were understood to mean by the Christian landowners of Cyprus in the days of the Apostles, and by priests and people in the lifetime of S. Jerome.

We have seen in recent years how forcibly the historical aspect of the society and system created by Christ can be drawn in its severest lines of moral beauty by one, who says nothing of his personal belief or unbelief in the Divine nature of the Christianity he admires.<sup>1</sup> Suppose that one, as remarkable for his critical faculty, should devote himself to the task of drawing out to the uttermost the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, in all His

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<sup>1</sup> The author of "Ecce Homo."

extreme and thorough-going rules of conduct in reference to the Christian's duty to himself, the world, and God. It is likely that those, who think they know their Bible well, would be astounded at the severity and exalted standard of the Evangelical rules of daily life.<sup>1</sup> Some day modern Christians will awake and marvel at the delusion, that the religion accepted by them as sufficient is Apostolical Christianity: but, not to wait in indolence, until the veil be wholly taken away from the heart of this generation, let us honestly face the severity of the Holy Gospels, and in every effort of the will to see the truth some scale will fall from our eyes. At first we may have a dim sense of saints walking through the world, with no clear discernment of their ways, how, living in the world, they were never of the world. By degrees we shall see Jesus to be "the way, the truth, and the life," and, seeing Him, shall do as the disciples of the Baptist did, follow the Lamb of God, and abide with Him through the day.

I. Think either of the interior or exterior duties

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<sup>1</sup> A slight sketch of the work I am thinking of may be found in a masterly sermon by John Henry Newman, "The Apostolical Christian," in the volume of "Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day."

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of the Christian life as taught by Christ, and practised by His disciples: and you will wonder at the gloss put on this teaching, even by religious men and women around you, and at their unhesitating assumption, that theirs is a faithful version of the Gospel worthy to become the tradition of the Church. For example, the blessedness of being "poor in spirit" and "meek," which, if it mean anything, means the contrary of self-assertion: the duty of rejoicing in being ill thought of for Christ's sake: judging ourselves for a sinful look, as if it were an act of sin: heartily forgiving real injuries, and being zealous to do a good turn to those who wish us evil: ministering to others in humble menial services, even to the washing of their feet, though they be in our judgment as undeserving of the name of brethren as was Judas, when he went out from the supper room into the night: loving Christ so far beyond all objects of natural affection, as to hate them in comparison, and be ready to forsake them, so that we may live closer to our Lord: to be merely in the world and nothing more, not *of* it: to deny ourselves daily, and make that self-denial a real cross: to think riches such a temptation and hindrance to heavenly-mindedness, as to cry "Woe on them:" to look on the praise of men,

their compliments, expressions of gratitude, and rewards, all promotion, favour, popularity, all such affectionate esteem as disposes one under obligation to call us "father" or "master," to regard all these solaces of daily life, which to our natures are as sweet oil dropped on the friction of drudging duties and creaking hinges of tiresome homes, as so many vails upon our faith, shutting out the sight of God, and as the bribes of a false world robbing us of a reward in Heaven ! This is the teaching we evade !

Where is the trustworthy interpreter of His Word, who shall comfortably assure us, that we have no need even to inquire if *these* counsels apply to us, for under no possible condition of modern English life can they be meant to do so, viz., "Jesus said unto him" (a young man, how different from many young men with money in London, I know not!) "if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven: and come and follow Me." "Freely ye have received, freely give." Or this, "His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But He said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given .... There be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs

for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."<sup>1</sup> Or this, "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My Name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."<sup>2</sup> Or this, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"<sup>3</sup>

Catholics, who resent with indignation the gloss so convenient to some, who use unkindly the words in the office of Baptism, "Seeing that this child is regenerate;" who have not much more respect for those, who interpret according to their un-Catholic theology the plain declaration in the Ordinal, "Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained;" Christians, who in all charity towards other men, but in loyal devotion to the faith of Christ, contend absolutely and strictly for the full sacramental import of the words, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he

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<sup>1</sup> S. Matt. xix. 10, 11, 12,

<sup>2</sup> S. Matt. xix. 29.

<sup>3</sup> S. John v. 44. See also S. Matt. v. 39; xii. 36; S. Luke vi. 24, 26, 32, 34.

that believeth not shall be dammed,"<sup>1</sup> and these, " Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you "<sup>2</sup>—we, who revere the truth of Christ's doctrine in these things, cannot be content with inferior interpretations of those words of equal authority, which tell us how hard, and strict, and self-denying, and pure, and unworldly the daily practice of Christ's disciples must be.

Whence, but from a vain attempt to dilute the insoluble words of Jesus Christ, comes the tradition, which the revival of Catholic truth is only slowly breaking down among us, that we have a general dispensation from *fasting*, that is, from one-third portion of the whole duty of the Christian man? The prevalence of this opinion makes it necessary to enter more minutely into its spiritual power; and first, of fasting in the literal and primary intention of the word.

II. The prejudice against fasting from food, as a discipline savouring of materialism, is met by our Blessed Lord's declaration, that it has by God's law a specific spiritual force against the spiritual powers of evil: " This kind goeth not out but by prayer and

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<sup>1</sup> S. Mark xvi. 16.

<sup>2</sup> S. John vi. 53.

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fasting."<sup>1</sup> There are laws in the spiritual kingdom as absolute and invariable as those, whose subject-matter in the physical kingdom incites the genius of natural philosophers; and the law of fasting is one of them.

Our Blessed Lord Himself worked by this law in His effort to cast out the spirit of uncleanness which possessed the woman of Samaria. When she came and found Him sitting by the well, He was fasting. His Body was brought low by weariness of travel and abstinence from food. Not for His own sake, but for ours, He prepared Himself by this mortification of the Body for the great struggle of exorcising from this poor woman the evil spirit, that had ruled her licentious life.

S. Francis Xavier prepared himself for assaults on the strongholds of the Evil One by fasting. And once, it is reported, when he had contended for days together on board ship with a man of high rank, whose profession of Christianity and godless life scandalised the heathen, and all his efforts to bring the reprobate to confession and repentance were met by blasphemous denials, he went on shore with him, and graciously invited him to take a walk with him in the woods, and then and there, suddenly stopping, he laid his shoulder

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<sup>1</sup> S. Matt. xvii. 1.

bare, and drawing forth a scourge, knelt upon the ground, and lashed himself till the earth was red with his blood ; then explaining how his *Lord* had suffered far greater pain for his sins, he won the sinner to confession and repentance for his crimes.<sup>1</sup> God proves that He has chosen to give to fasting and prayer a special spiritual power. Who can doubt it ? It is the concurrent testimony of the Saints.

On the other hand, fullness of bread is declared to be the cause of many of the worst vices that kill the soul. Not intemperance only in eating and drinking, but a delicacy of living has subtle affinities to impurity of heart, and slothfulness, and an unsaintlike softness of spirit.<sup>2</sup> It is hard, God knows, to hear such words, and be assured that we must act upon them, but this is an axiom of a Saint, “The body never thrives but at the expense of the soul.” And another, commenting on a maxim in the Book of Proverbs,<sup>3</sup> “He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child, shall have him become his son at the length,” interprets

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<sup>1</sup> Life of S. Francis Xavier, by Rev. H. J. Coleridge, S. J. i. 262.

<sup>2</sup> Hence the technical use in religious writers of the words “luxuria,” “mollities.” Even Cicero writes, “intelligimus quā turpe sit diffluere luxuriā, et delicatè ac molliter vivere.”

<sup>3</sup> Prov. xxix. 21.

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it thus: the body is the servant of the soul, and must not be indulged, lest it rise impudently and rebel, and bring discord into the house.

III. Again, fasting does this good work for us. It is difficult for persons born in affluence not to believe that all things in life are intended to minister to their enjoyment, as with the young princess, who wrote,

“Concluding in those hours of glee,  
That all the world was made for me.”

Crosses, and troubles, and privations seem to be exceptions and unnatural growths. Prosperity, comfort, and the regular supply of all our wants in a timely hour, before the moment comes when they make themselves felt by pain, begins to be thought the normal condition of our earthly life.

Now fasting sharply cuts across this habit. It contradicts and chastises this indolent and self-indulgent temperament. It may be said in sober truth, that in many cases, unless persons exercise themselves by fasting in meat and drink, they never know by experience the blessed sense of dependence on Another for the gift of daily bread. “Woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger.” “That is,” says Bishop Wilson, one of the plainest and severest interpreters of the Sermon on the Mount into the common use of

English life, “ye, whose daily meals are feasts, who make profession of a life of sensuality, who know not what it is to fast, even when the Church requires it—woe to such Christians!”

Again, though I am far from thinking that fasting immediately and by necessity produces humility, yet this it does: by the depression of physical strength and its accompaniments, it helps a man by many degrees to realize the attitude of a true humility. To the imagination of a Christian there is but a slight step onward from the outward discipline, “I wept, and chastened myself with fasting,” to the inward affection, “I refrain my soul, and keep it low.”

Fasting, moreover, has the power, by God’s law, of producing effects like these :

It proves the superfluity of many comforts and luxuries, which habit suggests to be necessities. It conveys immunity from real or fancied wants, which exercise a tyranny over the will. It impresses on the mind the sense of God’s Presence, and the prompt action of His Law against all manner of sin: a man fasting, even if he do not *love* God, must *think* of Him. It discourages much talking. It clears the spiritual intelligence, and quickens the spiritual imagination, hiding our life, for the time being, with Christ in God.

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Abstracting the soul from passing interests, it helps it to follow the command, “Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.”<sup>1</sup>

IV. It is implied by all that has been said above, that fasting, to do these good things for us, must be severe or strict enough to make the body *feel*. I mean, no slighter exercise than shall give a sense of real discomfort, or even pain, will be adequate to the work; in other words, no merely frugal or habitually temperate mode of life answers to the Gospel law of fasting. *That* is a virtue in itself, eminently a virtue: but temperance is one thing, and when Christ spoke of fasting, He meant another.

The apology of many Christians offers a testimony to this truth. They do not say, “I am a temperate, frugal man, therefore I obey the law of fasting:” but, “I am a temperate, frugal man, therefore I need not fast.” They are frank, but disobedient.

And what is their plea for disobedience? Their health! Well, but a thing may give the body real discomfort and pain, and yet not endanger health. Macarius, a famous Egyptian ascetic, laid down this principle: “A monk should so fast and keep his body

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<sup>1</sup> Jer. iv. 8.

under, as if he were to live for an hundred years, but so mortify the affections of his soul, as if he were to die the next moment." And that delicacy of health, which is made an excuse for so much laxity and disobedience, let us examine its pleas a little more.

Delicate health is often the creature of our imagination. No one with the commonest reflection can help accusing himself of imagining many infirmities of the body, which are simply the effects of an unexercised and feeble will. Many a *malade imaginaire* may be found in our churches like that lady of fashion, who, after a London season, consulted an eminent physician in the country, and, being recommended by him to take walking exercise, declined the prescription, saying she could not walk. Some days after, he invited her to drive with him, and see some famous ruins a few miles distant from the town. While they were inspecting the ruins, the coachman by his orders drove the empty carriage home; upon which his patient, with much indignation, had to prove to her physician and herself that she *could* walk, and be none the worse for the exercise. A little pressure of necessity (and the authority of Christ's Church, and a will as strong in favour of obedience, as it is now of disobedience, is the

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most wholesome pressure we can have) will prove to us often, that we can endure hardness without any injury to health.

As an instance of the power of imagination, it is known as a fact, that if a man wait for a meal, or take insufficient food, deliberately for a religious purpose, he feels the sensation of fasting more quickly and acutely than if he should do the same by accident and without forethought. What is this but the force of imagination? And who dares say that the will, growing on the roots of Christian faith and Divine Grace, will not overcome even the imagination?

But consider the cases, where the delicacy we speak of is real. Nevertheless it is not in all cases the effect of disease. On the contrary, it is often the result of habit, and of habit for which we, by our own fault, are responsible. There are few things about us, for which we are more responsible, than for the habit of softness, self-indulgence, shrinking from cold, and exercise, and early rising, and hardness of all kind, even if but a needle-point of a splinter of the Cross of Jesus graze the skin of the tender hand, that has never known the manly work and rough usage of the Christian life. Then it follows, that oftentimes these, who urge their delicacy as a plea for a general dispensation, are just

the persons for whom the Church wisely ordains the discipline of fasting. That discipline has a special propriety in such cases, first, as a humiliation and confession of past sin in a luxurious, soft, and self-pleasing life; and, secondly, as the very remedy they need to restore their soul to the healthy tone of a robust and Christian manhood.

V. The subject is so practical, that it is worth pursuing into futher details. I will suppose that you have a reason for being excused on the score of health from anything like literal fasting in the matter of food. You are excused obedience in the letter: but what honest conscience excuses itself obedience in the spirit? If necessity alone oblige you to break the rule of fasting, you can still make many differences in the quality of your food, and practise abstinence in things, which, trifles though they be, nevertheless are real luxuries. Those, who were not rich enough to offer a lamb, did not appear before the Lord empty, but brought a turtle dove or two young pigeons.

Besides, you may eat and drink unwillingly.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> "Let the rich follow their habit of infirmity, but regret that they cannot do otherwise; for had they the power to do otherwise, they would be able to do better. If then the poor man is not elated by his beggary, why are you elated by reason of your infirmity? Use, if you must, your choice and exquisite meats,

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bodily appetite may eat, but the spirit and will may fast, as did Queen Esther, when she and her maidens kept the fast in sorrow, while outwardly she prepared a banquet for the King and Haman.

And this other thought will in many cases inure us to hardness, and extinguish the eagerness to make a light excuse. Before a man pleads the delicacy of his body, let him strictly ask himself the question, how far his body has in his lifetime ministered to sin—sins of luxury, intemperance, sloth, violence, rudeness, irreverence, impurity, and fear! It is not without a mother's severe regard for the purity of her sons and daughters, that the Church on the first week in Lent insists on fasting, on the two following Sundays warns them in the Epistle, with much plain speaking, against the deadly sins of the flesh, and in two Lessons reads us the story of Esau, who lost God's blessing through an unbridled appetite, and of Joseph, who through the trial of his purity became worthy to be a type of the spotless Lamb of God. Verily, the discipline of fasting, reject it as

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since, if it has become your habit, you can do no other; and a change of use would make you sick. You have a dispensation: use superfluous luxuries, give superfluous luxuries also to the poor: use costly dishes, give them also to the poor."—*S. Augustine.*

men please by their traditions, goes to the very root and truth of a man's life. His obedience or disobedience in this matter oftentimes determines whether he shall be guilty of deadly sin, or whether he shall keep himself unspotted from the world.

VI. But it would be an unfaithful account of the Church's doctrine of fasting to restrict it in any way to the matters of meat and drink.

Remember the end: and there will be a more correct estimate of the means. The great end of the Lenten fast is to subject the body to the spirit: as it is the end of prayer to elevate the spirit to God.

Fasting, in its spiritual intention, is to make our penitence more incisive, and our devotion more sincere. Hence it must begin with abstinence from our besetting sin. And this opens up the whole subject of repentance in its various parts, confession, satisfaction, and amendment.

a. To speak only of the first. *Confession* of sin may be made secretly to God, or to God in the presence of a Priest. Now, in whichever mode he desires to make his confession, one, who would keep the law of fasting in Lent, that is, who resolves to do his duty to himself, will apply this law stringently to his confessions. His confession, like his fasting, *must give pain*. It must

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touch the sins he is most ashamed to confess, the meanest sins that he hates the most, the sweetest sins that he loves the best. He must take the knife and cut right down, even if its edge be turned against the very bone. He must apply the fire to the morbid growth and burn it back to the quick. No dissimulation, no playing at fasting! Half confessions are an artifice of Satan. Let a man confess his sins, as Joshua bade Achan make his confession, not as an experiment to prove if it will secure our heart's ease, but for the glory of God, and for a witness to truth. Think of the miserable confessions which are made, and then hear the righteous manly voice of the father of his people: "Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him, and tell me now what thou hast done. Hide it not from me." Lent is a great time for repairing bad confessions.

*b.* Again, remember that when you have done all the detail aright, you may take a wrong aspect of the whole. You may have examined your heart, "and that not lightly and after the manner of dissemlers with God;" nevertheless the most exact confession of particular acts of sin is only the enumeration of so

many *symptoms*. Do remember this. And there may be all these confessions without repentance !

So also in some cases, (I give an extreme instance, the better to exhibit the principle I contend for) there may be true repentance without any confession of particulars, as when the penitent thief threw his heart, in one movement of his will, wholly at the feet of Jesus. Let no one take it for granted that the habit of confessing special sins to God even though it be in the ordinance, so blessed to many souls, of confession before a Priest, is by necessity equivalent to true conversion.

No—be well assured, that repentance is not the enumeration of one sin or of one thousand sins, even when accompanied by a certain sense of pain and shame ; but repentance is the abhorrence of the mind from all sin ! Change your heart towards God, and your body will follow suit. “ When a man so repents, that what was sweet to him in life has now a bitter taste in his soul, and what once gave him delight in his body now gives him anguish in his heart, then his sorrow in the sight of God is good.” Strive to apply the law of fasting strictly to your confessions according to this saying of S. Francis de Sales : “ The severest of all austerities is fasting ;

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for it lays the axe to the root of the tree, whereas all else does but press lightly here and there."

c. Moreover, the activity of the soul is inexhaustible in devising rules of self-discipline, if only it be honestly set to live in the light of God.

For example, one of our great snares, with the advantages of society within easy reach, is, to think that we cannot abstain from the praise and favour of men. Good breeding, culture, wealth, personal attractions, gentle manners, a bright address, make us very acceptable. Remember also, that religion carried to a certain point adds to a man's attractiveness. Nay more, a decided character in religion, and the repute, which soon follows such distinction in man or woman, brings its special temptation. In every age of religious revival there will be victims of this kind.

With so many good and religious and Catholic-minded persons, rich in capacities of influence, why, oh! why are there so few saints among us? Among influential preachers and priests, why do so many fail to inspire us with their holiness? Because they are lacking in the severity of the Christian life. They are too much of the world, and thus have less influence over men *in* the world. There is not enough salt

in our good people. There is too little light, glorifying God in their good works. Oh! what shall keep us pure from the caresses of the world, and our hearts true in the fear and love of God, but that simplicity which comes of a plainness and severity of life?

Take our use of the natural gifts which God has given us. Press the law of fasting upon such weak points as these. For instance, a man is good-looking, gentlemanlike, clever, a lover of art, has a good voice, is eloquent in conversation, promising in his profession; and he adds that charm, which lends a poetry even to the prose of virtue—he is not shy of stepping out of the routine of the world, where also he is admired; and is remarked as dutiful, devout, a frequenter of the Sacraments, a friend of distinguished priests, an ornament of his church! But “one thing is lacking.” Will he be perfect? Let him be severe with himself, keep a rigid fast from all things that may offend humility and simplicity, use not his talents as Adonijah, the king’s spoilt son, or as Absalom, whose loyalty was corrupted by his love of praise, so that he “stole the hearts of the men of Israel” for himself.

The rule of fasting touches women also in matters, the mention of which may make a novice smile, such

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as dress, and manner, and salutations, and confidences, and friendships, and the manifold arts of pleasing. But a discipline of fasting in these details touches the life of the woman's soul.

A woman past the bloom of youth professedly makes a study of the art of dress, knowing that she cannot afford to omit anything, which may help to maintain her old ascendancy. Not that the art of dress is bad in itself.<sup>1</sup> To one person it may be no more a snare, than the stream of water was to Gideon's three hundred, who lapped it, putting their hands swiftly to their mouth, as they passed on to battle: while upon another it may bring down the rebuke, "How *can* ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh of God only?" In all such things it is the intention, which makes it to be either sin or purity; just as in regard to fasting from food, a saint has said, "There is to some more merit in eating dainties without caring for them, than to eat coarse food with satisfaction."

VII. In conclusion, let this be our rule, as S. Bernard puts it: "If the appetite alone has sinned, let that alone fast: but if other members, let them

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<sup>1</sup> See a graceful poem, "My Lady Nature and her Daughters," in Dr. Newman's "Verses on various occasions." Third edition.

also fast. The eye from curious sights and wandering glances, from looking with pleasure at any glass which reflects self; the ear from rumours, praise of self, slanders, gossips, controversy; the tongue from detraction, murmuring, fault-finding, talking of self and of our own troubles; the hand from needless work which hinders prayer: but, more than all, the soul from vices and self-will. Thus only shall we avoid provoking God to reject our offerings: 'Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure.'"

Especially must a Christian bear in mind, that while the Israelite in all his good efforts worked unto justification, we work from justification. Christ Jesus by His grace has saved us; therefore we by His Holy Spirit strive to walk in His steps. God has first loved us, therefore we strive to keep our body under, in proof that we love Him. Christ of His own free love has separated us from our mother's womb, and made us to be members of His Body: therefore we desire even in our very members to glorify Him.

Let this thought be ever in our mind, "If a man strive for mastery, yet he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully." And Christ's law for us is this. As He offered Himself for us to God, and offered us in Himself, so we in Him offer ourselves daily unto the

Father. The victim is self. The presentation of the victim is the oblation of self. The sacrifice is the slaying of our self-love. Therefore we have it in us to fulfil the Apostle's counsel, that "ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." Does any one question us, "Do ye these things, that ye may be saved?" No, by no means! We *are saved* already by His grace, wherefore we strive to love Him—yea, we desire to be like Him. We must be like Him, or we love Him not. The law of fasting is made for Christ's children, and made especially for those who are rich and affluent in His bounty. Let not these be the first to cry off and plead for dispensations to feast always, when their poorer brethren are, as the rich would call it, always fasting. They were the Pharisees, who in the day of our Blessed Lord made themselves look sad and pale, and pretended before the world to fast. Let not this generation produce the modern Sadducee, making himself out to be delicate and weak, in order to escape the obligation of the law of Christ, which binds him to endure hardness, if he will reign with Him.

God knows what trials of endurance may be in store for us. It is prudent to exercise ourselves betimes in little things. "It is good for a man that he bear the

yoke in his youth.“ Any yoke, even a resolution offered by a child, and borne for the love of Jesus, is a memorial of the Cross of the dear Lord Who saved us—and saved by His Precious Blood we are! Therefore “ Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. It is a faithful saying, for if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.””

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<sup>1</sup> For some thoughts in this chapter the writer is indebted to a sermon of Massillon “ Sur le jeûne.”

## CHAPTER III.

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### ALMSGIVING.

#### MAN'S DUTY TO HIS NEIGHBOUR.

WHATEVER men may say in extenuation of the severity of the Gospel, there will always be those, who will not be put off with translations of our Blessed Saviour's stringent words into polite phrases in use among persons living delicately in king's houses. They may have many possessions or few: they may hear Christ's counsel, and have no heart to take Him at His word: they may go away from Him sorrowful: but there cleaves to them a barbed arrow, which no soft hand of a courtly interpreter will draw out without leaving an ugly wound.

“Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had

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great possessions."<sup>1</sup> To the end of time there will be men haunted through life with this shadow; dreaming, if no more than dreaming, on this vision; deaf to the prudence of political economists; an enthusiasm for charity, to the extreme of poverty, stirred in their soul by the weird echo of this voice of the Carpenter of Nazareth. I know not if it be *this*, which holds the heart in a spell, "Jesus beholding him loved him:" or *this*, "he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved," the word creating in us a sickening fear, lest our possessions should steal our heart away from Christ. Or is it *this*, the vision of liberty promised to one who has given up all for all, and has nothing left to detain him from Him, "Whose service is perfect freedom;" the liberty of one, who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, the liberty that makes melody in the heart, and in all danger ensures immunity from fear?

"Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator."

I. I know not, which note in this chord first strikes the delicate springs upon which man's conscience moves: but I do know, that this word of Jesus, spoken so suddenly to one rich young man, who

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<sup>1</sup> S. Mark x. 21, 22.

came running to Him excitedly, and went off from Him slowly and sadly meditating on the hard surrender he was called to make, contains not a particular or personal rule, but a principle of infinite extension and universal propriety in all ages and climates of the world. It is as much a *principle*, as that we are "justified by faith," or "your sin will find you out," or "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap," are not rules but principles.

And if this principle has in other ages worked in the direction of the cloister, it will work some day in the direction of the hearth. The greater the advance in wealth, the more sumptuous the luxury in English households, and the greater the separation between rich and poor, the more quickly will hearts catch fire at this word of Jesus, and apply its principle to the life in the Christian home, all matronly and moderate counsels notwithstanding.

Nay more, the Church, which is our common home, will be wrapt in the same flame of enthusiasm to sell all she has, and give to the poor: and She, whom her enemies revile as the "lordly Establishment," will send forth her richest sons and her fairest daughters, under rulers of the Church not afraid to lead them, who shall win our heathen cities, baptized and un-

baptized, by the spectacle of their devoted obedience to the mind of Christ, to at least a hearing of *His* Gospel, Who emptied Himself and became poor, that He might make many rich.

Again, it will hardly move men's minds less powerfully in the same direction to reflect, that, as a fact, the only remembrance, made at the Judgment Seat, of any works of piety (according to our dear Lord's vision of that scene) is the King's remembrance of almsgiving :<sup>1</sup> and the only sin, which is there audibly condemned with a curse, is the indifferent and selfish neglect of giving alms. Now, when Christ out of manifold virtues selects one, and sets it in so illustrious a frame, making it, by the form in which He puts it, so personal an endearment to Himself, we cannot think less of it than this, that it was *the* feature of the final Judgment of human life uppermost in His thoughts.

Again, have you not been often startled by the boldness of imputing so much spiritual force to almsgiving, as is plainly attributed to it in these words of our Blessed Lord ? " Give alms of such things as ye have, and, behold, all things are clean unto you."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Matt. xxv. 31-46.

<sup>2</sup> S. Luke xi. 41.

Almsgiving creating a purity of conscience and a sincerity of the hidden life! Who but in Gospel words would venture to say so much? And then we are prepared for this law in the spiritual kingdom, which, were it found in the Apocrypha alone, would straightway be called apocryphal: "Shut up alms in thy storehouses, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction."<sup>1</sup> "Alms do deliver from death."<sup>2</sup> "Manasses gave alms, and escaped the snares of death which they had set for him, wherefore now, my son, consider what alms doeth, and how righteousness doth deliver."<sup>3</sup> And this in the book of Daniel, himself an example of holiness to all Christian youth for ever. "O king, break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor."<sup>4</sup> We priests should lose our character with half our congregations for preaching "the Gospel," if we dared say half as much as this on the influence of alms!

II. But let me come nearer home. Almsgiving is a third portion of the whole duty of man. It is equivalent to charity, the love of our neighbour, our duty towards man, and therefore it is a command-

<sup>1</sup> Ecclus. xxix. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Tobit iv. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Tobit xiv. 10, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Dan. iv. 27.

ment "exceeding broad." But just as it has been stated in the case of fasting, the wider sense must not obliterate the literal and primary sense, though it be a narrower one.

I am disposed to think, that the duty of almsgiving is understood even at a later period in our life than fasting. Greediness and self-indulgence in meat and drink is an early vice in children: and so, when it is put before them, the sense of fasting is more readily understood. But in regard to charity, although children are very fond of making gifts, especially to the poor, this is nothing like obedience to the law of almsgiving. There is no almsgiving but in the spirit of Christ's word, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto *Me*;" that is, the recognition of Christ's presence in men and women around us, devotion to our Blessed Lord as present in every member of His Body, and the confession, that every one is our neighbour, for Jesus' sake, who happens to want our help. Hence though youth be far more unworldly than later manhood, almsgiving has little place in the conscience of the young.

I doubt if at any time of life it be so commonly neglected, as when unmarried sons and daughters are living in their father's home, everything being found

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them, except a few personal expenses, which are a plea in many families for a considerable allowance. The habit, once contracted, of enjoying the personal luxury of wealth, while the responsibility of property is relegated to the father of the house, is not unlikely to follow young people into their early married life. And perhaps I am not overstating what you know to be the truth, when I say, that in no English families is the taste for comfort and luxury stimulated, and a selfish care for money and money's worth, whether in the pleasure of spending or investing, indulged more unscrupulously than in newly-married homes, where the desire of the husband and wife is to indulge, not to say, spoil one another, and whose ambition it is to commence the married life with as nearly as possible the same amount of comfort, as the father has acquired after thirty or forty years of prudent frugality and unremitting work.

If these words come home to any readers, let them remember also, that not only does such a habit of life leave scant material for alms, but (what is less remediable) it preoccupies the mind in a wrong direction, perverts the religious sense as to our tenure of any worldly goods at all, and obliterates, in favour of fashion and self-indulgence, every notion of steward-

ship, of which an account must be rendered to the Lord. It is thus that many persons, with a good deal of natural piety and undeniable kindness of heart, take up an utterly wrong position at starting, and drift into the evil condition of worldly and ungodly homes. They give their whole mind to the appointments of their house, or pamper their wives in the same foolishness, and trust to chance appeals for charity to keep in exercise their impulses of benevolence, practically reversing our Blessed Lord's command, which is to give no thought, that is, no carefulness and anxiety to these things, but to seek the kingdom of God *first*.<sup>1</sup>

Nor can any afford to disregard this consideration, if they earnestly desire to set their houses in order, and regulate them, as Christian homes, by the laws of fasting and almsgiving as well as by the law of prayer. Luxury and self-indulgence are relative terms. Necessity in one case may be luxury in another. It does not therefore follow, because one family, inheriting wealth and a sumptuous mode of life, just as it inherits

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<sup>1</sup> "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."—S. Matt. vi. 31-33.

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high breeding, may live in a certain luxury and splendour with impunity, that all other families can do the same, if only they can as punctually pay their debts. In an age like the present, when wealth may be rapidly increased, nay, created out of nothing but brains and industry, there is serious danger to souls, when a sudden access of riches by trade or marriage plunges men into a flood of luxury, which quickly draws into itself the three great vices of human life, sensuality, covetousness, and pride. It does not command respect even in the judgment of the world, nor is it reputed to be good taste, when the *nouveaux riches* break out into an extravagance of living, for which they have neither prepared their neighbours, nor educated themselves. In such cases, the scornfulness of the rebuke may be almost condoned for the sake of its truth, when one of good breeding is heard to remark of another who has made money fast and risen from the ranks, "He does not know how to spend ten thousand a year!" If such extravagance of style offend good taste, and is deemed a mistake by men of the world, it is no less melancholy a sight in the eyes of a Christian. The habit of mind, which such expenditure produces, is fatal to all spiritual aspirations. The excess of creature comforts alienates the soul from

the consolations of the Spirit, and induces a materialism and coarseness of perception which painfully contracts the vision of truth.

III. In the next place, let us think how universal is the application of the law of almsgiving.

None is so poor as not to find another more destitute than himself. Our Blessed Lord in His tenderness has reduced the measure of charity to the lowest level of our capacity. We remember His words about the widow's mite, the cup of cold water, the lad with the five barley loaves and two small fishes, and the loving-kindness of His claim, "the Lord hath need of them :" and His Own benefaction to the poor out of the common purse, common to Himself and those, who had given up all to follow Him ! And, even where there is no purse, S. Peter leaves us not without resources. "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee."<sup>1</sup> In the same spirit S. Augustine, preaching to a mixed congregation of all social classes, gives instances of charity where only by comparison with a case of greater destitution the giver can be said to have anything to give. And, as a climax, he tells of two beggars meeting on the road,

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<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 6.

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one of whom was blind and the other lame : the blind man bore the lame upon his shoulders, and the lame guided the blind ; and so, says the preacher, they bore each other's burdens.

Again, if no person is excused from almsgiving, no circumstance is without its opportunity. Almsgiving is a mode of expressing in act the thought of mercifulness : and mercifulness is the attitude, which love takes up towards any one, whom we can benefit. There are seven corporal works of mercy, viz., feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty ; clothing the naked ; entertaining the stranger ; visiting the sick ; redeeming the captive ; visiting the fatherless and widow ; and burying the dead. There are also seven spiritual works of mercy, viz., teaching the ignorant ; directing the doubtful ; comforting the sorrowful ; correcting the sinner ; forgiving the offender ; supporting the weary ; and praying for all men. To many persons these seven corporal works and seven spiritual works are as familiar as the seven notes of the scale ; and their hands are ever on them, trying new combinations, and proving, according to their increasing capacity, the infinite harmonies of Love. And, as a man has been heard to say of his wife, "she is full of music to the tips of her fingers," and he watches with purest

pleasure, how deftly and patiently she puts her children's hands upon the notes, and exercises them in the use of melodious sounds before their imagination reaches unto the realms, where—

“Souls by nature pitch'd too high,  
By suffering plung'd too low,”

utter their thoughts with “neither speech nor language, but their voices are heard among them;” so delightedly does Christ observe the daughters of His Church to be conversant with these ministries of mercy, till Christian habit becomes a second nature, and their children learn them under the genial influence of the charities of home.

But I am afraid, that it must also be said, that not a few men and women, even if by the hands of almoners they have spent some portion of their wealth and care on the corporal works of mercy, never in their whole life gave themselves to do one of the seven spiritual works. And then—oh! what a *mistake*<sup>1</sup> will their whole life appear to be, when the soul goes forth alone from the body, and the only life remaining to it in Paradise is the life of the soul, and that life so intense; and there is no body to be seen in that world

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<sup>1</sup> *Αμαρτία* = sin.

of spirits, and the unsleeping soul keeps watch through the long night of memory, and contains within itself, unsupported by contact with any object of sense, all the remembrances of the life on earth, and all the anticipations of the life in heaven! Whilst our hand is on the earthen vessel, attending with carefulness to the relief of its necessities, let not an age of material benevolence persuade us to forget the heavenly treasure!

IV. A spiritual mind will refer all it sees with devotion to God. Our Blessed Saviour has helped us to do this by marking every one we meet with His Own image, and causing the light of His Own precious love to dwell on a certain spot of every man's being. As in nature there is an illuminated point in the eye of a man, to which we direct our look so soon as we converse with him, and that minute light in his eye represents to us the whole person; so has Christ mercifully provided, that in the kingdom of grace we shall behold in every brother, even in his body, the "marks of the Lord Jesus." Christ has set His seal upon him already in these words: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My Brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

The love of Jesus has made that common, dull, uninteresting, vulgar, and repulsive being, which is

lying at your gate, what by nature he cannot be. By the Sacramental power of His Incarnation, He has made him a member of His Body: and as, if so much as the foot be trodden on in a crowd, the man, whose head is reared above the people, turns himself round, and with dignity on his brow and rebuke upon his lip, says aloud, "You have trodden on *me*," so, if we neglect the meanest member of His Body, Christ accepts the offence as done to Himself, and judgment against us is delivered for our courtesy in these terms: "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."<sup>1</sup>

Ah! think, if our Blessed Lord, having died for us, had said only, "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these *your brethren*," surely it would have been enough! Or, if on earth in the days of His humiliation He had said, "these *My brethren*!" Or, if He had waited till men were glorified in heaven to call them so! But His claim on our alms He has fortified by many degrees. The King in heaven speaks of the poor and sad and weary upon earth in this

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<sup>1</sup> S. Matt. xxv. 45, 46.

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endearing word, “ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”

“ Lazarus is at the gate. Thou know'st it not :  
Or, ah too well I know thy heart would bleed,  
Howbeit used on gentle thoughts to feed.  
Thou know'st it not, Thy Saviour is on earth :  
Oh, haste ; for time is on the wing, and while  
Thou know'st it not, thy Judge is at the door.”

This recognition of Christ's image in others will prove no less a safeguard of purity, than a motive of charity.

The mistress, who tempted “ Israel's long lost son ” presumed on her husband's absence and ignorance, and forgot the sanctity of Joseph's obligation to God. But he, turning away his eyes from her beauty, remembered her marriage vow, and discerned in her very body the image of his God. I need hardly lead you to remember, how S. Paul<sup>1</sup> most vehemently insists on the same motive for respect and a behaviour of purity towards the members of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. His splendid indignation against unchastity is one of the most crushing applications of the truth of the Incarnation and the reality of Baptismal Grace to be found in the New Testament.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 15-20.

Grasping the sin by its root, with the boldness of a true simplicity he brings one of the most prevalent and degrading vices among Christians, in spite of the lenient judgment of society, unmasked into the Presence of the Holiest, and sets it face to face, in its naked deformity, with the Virgin-born and spotless Body of the Son of Man.

The same principle rules in the Sixth Commandment. Violence towards the person, of which the extremity is murder, is declared to be the act of desecrating in the creature the image of the Creator. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man." Following this principle, civil law has given a noble testimony to the priceless value of human life, in that it avenges violence perpetrated on the vilest body of the most degraded criminal, even as if it were done to the most innocent of our race.

We see then, that the rule of Christian charity moves upon these lines. We are to "honour all men" in Christ, not only for that He is the "true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," but that His incarnate form is the image borne by them. We love our friend in Christ, our enemy for Christ. A lie is an offence, not only against the

Holy Spirit present in ourselves,<sup>1</sup> but a sin against God in Whom another has membership with us. "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another."<sup>2</sup> And for the same cause, when we speak the truth, we speak it in love.

V. It remains to be pointed out, that the discipline of fasting tends directly to enlarge the law of alms-giving. While charity bids us do unto others as we wish to be done by, it is fasting that exercises us in the self-knowledge, which informs us what is good or harmful to our own soul. One, who is on the alert and watchful for himself, will have a finer sense of sympathy with the spiritual necessities of another. The tension of the string, as it increases the power of vibration, adds to its sensibility. Delicacy of conscience, which is the result of fasting, will oblige us to revere the conscience of a brother. Knowing what is dangerous to ourselves, we use restraint in our address to others. The niceties of spiritual culture, which adorn the soul that exercises itself in godliness, will give us a tenderness of touch, a versatility of resource, and an intuitive sense of truth, in our intercourse with

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<sup>1</sup> Acts v. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ephes. iv. 25.

our fellows. That courtesy and reverence, which the politeness of the world accepts as a true homage to its art, comes by nature to the man of grace. That graciousness and loving-kindness, as pure as it is simple, which pleases without softness, and soothes without vanity, is only found in perfection in the Christian, whose hidden life is moved by the finer impulses of the Holy Ghost.

Hence it follows, that, like your fasting, these alms of yours are done in secret. The materials, wherewith you work, are so simple. It is only the Christ-like Spirit in you, which blesses the common elements of your daily life. The ordinary sayings and doings of society pass through your hands, and are distributed among those who sit around you ; and these are fed in their emptiness, refreshed in their dulness, chastened in their frivolity, purified in their earthliness, refined in their vulgarity ; and meanwhile they know not how it is all brought to pass ! How you have prepared yourself by the self-discipline of fasting ; and broken the common bread, as it lies by chance upon the table, with the thought of your dear Lord uppermost in your mind ; how you have blessed it by prayer, and hallowed it by the intention of charity, all this they know not. Your alms are done in secret.

Oh, do you know your power of blessing ? Do you consider what force God has given you in the direction of men's hearts ? "Ye are the salt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world." Oh ! put forth your powers, exercise your gifts, make full proof of your ministry ! You are the Evangelists of the world. By your life and conversation saints will be made or sinners hardened. But, if you will fulfil the law of charity, the love of Christ must shine in your very face. It must be lit up with the light that turns all to gold. It must gleam with a touch of reserve and modesty even in your dress. There must be a meekness and retirement even in the very adornments of your person, as of the glowworm shining amidst the folds of the lowly herbs.

Then will men and women gather round you, and the rude shall be subdued, the shallow deepened, the impure chastened, the worldly converted, and the infidel silenced, if he be not won. You will be patient with others, knowing how your patience with your own self is tried : anxiety for them shall be reduced from eagerness, and indifference quickened by the fervency of prayer. Your almsgiving shall be the outcome of your fasting, and the patience of your love for others the proof of your severity with yourself.

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## CHAPTER IV.

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### P R A Y E R.

I. If there be truth in the saying that fasting and almsgiving are the wings of prayer, it is still more true, that, while they prepare the body for the higher life, it is prayer that furnishes the wings, by which the body ascends. Fasting attenuates the veil of sense, which hides so much of the spiritual world ; but prayer enables the soul to pierce what still remains of the sensuous man. Fasting mortifies self will : but prayer animates the will of God in self. Fasting reduces the imperious appetites and makes them our slaves : but prayer sets up the Kingdom of God within us. Fasting binds our sins in chains and our passions with links of iron ; but prayer gives us liberty to be holy unto the Lord. Fasting subdues the body to the spirit : prayer raises the spirit aloft to God.

So also almsgiving extinguishes all unloving thoughts of man, restless ambition, all love of the

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creature, all selfishness and unforgiving thought : but it is prayer that enlarges our love to God, hides us in the treasury of light from the vulgar trinkets of praise and power, denies us satisfaction in any being but One, Infinite and Eternal, and penetrates us with a calming sense of being freely forgiven and wholly loved by the Sacred Heart, every breathing moment of our life, notwithstanding that It is shaded every moment by the terrible knowledge of our sins.

Such are the helps which fasting and almsgiving minister to prayer. Such also are their shortcomings behind the upward flight of prayer.

It is not uncommon, especially in an age abounding in active works of piety, to see a character strong in self-restraint and dutiful in its ministries of charity, but poor in the wealth of prayer. You see a man of virtue, strictly temperate, enduring hardness, sharply chastising his sensual propensities, despising the fictitious wants of youth and the morbid fantasies of an indolent old age, laborious, watchful, full of courage : and towards others he is lenient, openhanded, ready to give, generous to opponents, scrupulous in payment not of dues only, but the gratuities which charity suggests. So far, so good. Where there is one better, there are fifty worse !

Nevertheless one thing is lacking. If he will be perfect, he must become a man of prayer. You mark his several points and features ; but the symmetry and form of the perfect man is wanting. His virtue is a fragment, or a rude mosaic composed of fragments, strong, manly, with many of the elements of power ; but the fluent lines of beauty are not his, nor the finish, nor grace, nor restful spirit of repose, which, whether in nature or in art, alone satisfies our sense of perfectness.

II. Let us consider more in detail the evidences of a want of prayer.

In some men there is an earthliness in spite of their religion. You see nothing in them higher than the soul. There is no spirit. It is prosaic virtue, dry bread, Lenten fare ; no bridal grace adorning the union of the soul with God ; mere waterpots of stone, no changing of the water into wine. There are souls like men, who have never travelled,

“ With dull mechanic pacings to and fro ;”

insular in all their conceptions of religion ; having a competent knowledge of their own language, “ the vulgar tongue,” but dead to the harmonies of the human voice divine. They are like persons, who have

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never seen the sea, nor gazed on the starry heavens at night, nor looked on the face of death. Of this kind are many virtuous and actively religious men, in whom are not developed by use the rudimentary organs of prayer.

Again, there is a self-contentment and want of growth which directly results from this habit. The spiritual sense is dull. The pores of the soul are not open. The inspiration of holy desires and expiration of good works is checked. Man will not incline his ears to hear, and God ceases to renew His calls. A very unhappy condition is this, fatal not only to growth but life. These are the called—but not the chosen—the first who shall be last—to whom the publican and the harlot shall be preferred—who love little, for that they are forgiven little. “I have called and ye refused: I have stretched out My Hand, and no man regarded. Therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.”<sup>1</sup> “Because when I called, none did answer: when I spake, they did not hear; but they did evil before Mine Eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. i. 24, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah lxvi. 4.

And, further, there is a type of religious character, which is painfully devoid of liberty. With such a person *means* are always *ends*. His faith is never what a true faith is, "like air and water, colourless." He loves a dark church, where painted windows are set up, not to *admit* but to shut out light. He will follow narrow lines of written prayer, step by step, in a rigid groove, but dares not spread abroad his devotions to reach unto the Attributes of God, His Silence, Patience, Power, Truth, Judgment, Love! He takes office with the Nethimims whom David appointed for the service of the Levites, but cannot ascend with Abraham to gaze upon the stars that witness to the infinite glory of the gifts of God, nor stand upon the shore and hear His Voice "as the sound of many waters," and meditate upon His promises, which are "as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude."

The Christian character cannot afford to lose this liberty, and there is danger of it in some schools of thought among us! Some of you are becoming victims of printed forms of prayer, forgetting that children spell, in order that they may learn to read, and men read, to help them to think and speak. The multiplication of devout books, which reflect the strong character of a particular mind, or issue from the mint of the

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seminary or cloister (precious as many of them are, and sweet and simple, as the starry blooms of jessamine which shade the windows of the recluse), yet even this wealth of devotional literature risks your knowledge of the Bible; and S. John, whose Gospel was written in the serenest sphere of liberty, with no restriction to time or place, but intended for all ages and all people, is in danger of being less studied than the manual of some Spanish monk, and less remembered than the utterances which go forth from some Confessional in a modern English Church. Let us take care, that, with all our added blessings, our children do not know less of their Bible than our fathers and mothers knew.

And, again, not only in the matter of worship and knowledge, but in the way of life and action there is need of a righteous jealousy, lest the spirit of liberty be lost. All masters of holy living deprecate a *scrupulousness* of mind. And, although it be touching a subject of some delicacy in even suggesting caution, I venture to say, that a conscientious person, surrendering himself to a system of elaborate discipline administered by another, may become tied and bound, just where he should be free. Too frequent application to the counsels of another mind, and constant

recurrence to a visible director for petty rules instead of an education in principles, may be good milk for babes (although even this may be doubted), but certainly is not strong meat for men. A journey on iron rails, where the gradients are distinctly marked by the wayside on rigid posts in black and white, may be well enough to bear us, through night and day, to our distant point; and the occupation of watching with incessant curiosity these minute distinctions of level may be harmless to the vacant idler, and needful to the man of science, who must know the details of his craft, but it does not conduce to that experience of life and travel, which promotes a knowledge of men and things.

We must remember that our journey onward is not precious only for the sake of heaven which is beyond; but for its own sake, for Jesus' sake Whose Feet have marked it for us, and Who is Himself "the way," it is noble beyond compare, and would be, even though there were nothing beyond it of "exceeding great reward." The Christian's course from height to height of this lower earth, and his march across the broad spaces of his manhood's life, is a spectacle to Angels; and he cannot fulfil the truth of such a life without that liberty which comes of communing

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with God, with face unveiled, in prayer, "Spirit to spirit, Ghost to ghost."

III. Let us think awhile of the influence of Prayer in the education of the soul.

God is jealous over the soul, which He has created for Himself. He will educate His Own Child. It is His pleasure to communicate His mind in secret to the soul He loves. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets."<sup>1</sup> And the instrument of this Divine intelligence is prayer. He may send ministers to sow the seed, and Angels or shepherds to kindle the spark; but it is by keeping their sayings and pondering them in their heart (and this is one action of prayer) that the Saint's life is formed upon the mind of God. Also by reserving to Himself the communication of this knowledge, God proves to us the dignity and capacity of the soul. He will not suffer it to be content with any Teacher but Himself. When Jesus draws Mary to sit at His Feet, He proves not only his willingness to teach, but that He has ennobled her with the ability to learn.

By the same exercise of prayer He draws out the

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Amos iii. 7.

*affections* to Himself. He invites our familiar presence. He makes us His friends. "Frequent devotion maintains this friendship with God;" and He is ever more ready to hear than we to pray. In social life we know how many friends of youth are lost by our correspondence failing. The love may abide, but the liking is less. The community of interest declines, sympathy is less quick. Oh, think what life gains by prayer, which cherishes in us a "hearty liking to God."

Again, we know the value of the inheritance of a name, whose noble life has bequeathed to us great interests; and the richer blessing of a living friend, whose calm wisdom and wide knowledge and pure sympathy save us from sinking in the menial service of the world. Well, and what does prayer do? Does it not bind us to the generations of all Saints and all heroic Christian lives, and lay down lines beneath the grave by which from our earthly homes we communicate our sympathies to and fro with souls in Paradise? "All the good men from the beginning of time to this hour have practised prayer. Not one of them now in a better world but practised it."<sup>1</sup> And

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<sup>1</sup> F. W. Faber.

so writes Bishop Wilson also, in acknowledgment of the scope of prayer, its dominion in the spiritual world, and the difficulty of acquiring the habit of it. "He, that has learned to pray as he ought, has got the secret of a holy life."

Again, prayer, it may be said, immediately connects us with all those homes of piety, where the hidden life of men of God is attracting grace, as mountain tops draw clouds, and is storing up a wealth of treasure, as Joseph in his wise economy stored up beforehand seven years' harvest against seven years of famine. Oh, if we would believe, that the whole world were richer by reason even of a few living a life of prayer: that the weary days of the invalid, the offerings of the priest, the fastings of the penitent, if in their appointed lot they undertake the secret ministry of prayer, not only hallow their Father's holy Name, but make His Kingdom come upon the earth, as truly as the Apostle, who creates new churches, and the Evangelist, who by his preaching of the Gospel makes the dry bones to gather flesh and live!

In the kingdom of Christ there is need of S. John, who shall lie on the Bosom of His Lord, as there is need of S. Peter, who shall step out first in front to confess the truth, and walk on the water to go to

Jesus, and judge the hypocrite, whose lying heart is bringing confusion into the Church. The men of action cannot do their work, unless there be men of prayer beside them to communicate with the inner mind of Christ. Why did S. Peter bid S. John to inquire of the Lord, who it was that should betray Him, but for the consciousness that S. John was living closer to the hidden life of the Son of God? In the same way Martha could not satisfy her Lord by the utmost of her active ministries upon Him, unless Mary sat at His Feet in quiet contemplation and in the attitude of a reverent listening to His thoughts. The Church not only requires prayer to be offered in its own place, but cannot do her active work without the help of men of prayer. And, again, it is to be insisted on, that, while the distinction between the active and contemplative life is to be recognised, they shall not be divorced from one another. "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." No man can be Christ-like, who does not combine in fair proportions both characters. If one side of his life exhibit S. Peter, the other must express S. John.

Again, consider how the exercise of prayer increases charity—charity which makes us in respect to others patient and liberal. By prayer we extend our interests

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in the loftiest things of man and God: we promote cheerfulness and banish dulness from our hearts. Now, whereas dulness in ourselves provokes impatience and bitterness towards others (while we resent on them the stinging provocations of our own disquietude), an access of fresh interests infers an increase of hopefulness, and so we look on the world around us with a brighter eye. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." We know it, *if we are used to pray!* The surface of human life is strewn with ills enough to vex every soul that has a thought for righteousness. Beneath the crust is treasure, it may be the dust of bodies that will rise to eternal life. Everywhere "good is undermost;" but the divining rod is prayer.

Lastly, let us dwell for a few moments on the power of prayer to recall us, in this hurrysome, contentious, mercantile life of ours, which will estimate things by visible results, and would fain carry into religion the principle of "moderate profit and quick returns;" let us think how prayer by its subtle mysterious movements, the unlooked for presences and sudden vanishings of God which it creates, corrects this appetite for sight and educates the faculty of faith. I know how many loving souls, loving and beloved, make themselves

wretched in the thought that they do not pray, and that God does not care to visit them, simply because they fail to perceive and enjoy the sensible sweetness of prayer. I know also how hard it is to define the difference between faith and feeling, between the emotion of the affections and the "I am persuaded" and "I know," by which S. Paul declares his will, or the "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed," of the man after God's own heart. The movements of the soul are very delicate in so fine an action as prayer, which defies the test of material results, and the criterion of the judgment of a shortsighted man. Often the soul laments its loss of love, when it simply regrets the vanishing of feeling. It thinks all gone, when the blossom goes, having no patient eye for the fruit that has already set. Some fair souls indeed there are, who retain to a later age flower and fruit together, and that is a sight beautiful as it is rare—rare as the orange flower among trees, whose spray the woman wears but once a life.

S. Bernard, than whom no spiritual writer known to me touches with a lighter hand and truer discrimination the more delicate threads of the Christian life, has some exquisite thoughts on this very matter of the evidences of God's presence in the soul. "I confess,"

he says, "that to me also God has come ; and more often than not, when he has entered into me, I have not been sensible of His way of entering. I have felt Him to be present. At times I have had a presentiment of His coming, but of the actual entering in I have had no sensation, no, nor even of His departure from my soul. For, from whence He has come into my soul, or whither He has gone, or in what way He has come and gone, I know not, according to the word of Christ, 'Thou knowest not whence He cometh nor whither He goeth !' Nor is this to be marvelled at, seeing that this is He, of Whom it was said, 'Thy footsteps are not known.' Truly He entered not by the eyes, for His Presence was not marked by colour ; nor by the ears, for there was no sound ; nor by the breath, for He mingled not with the air but the mind ; nor by the touch, for He was impalpable. By what then did he enter ? Or peradventure He entered by no way, for that He came not from without at all ! Moreover He did not come to me from within, for He is good, and in me there is no good thing. You ask then how I knew that He was present ? Why, He was a quickening power. As soon as He was entered in, He awoke my slumbering soul. He moved and pierced my heart, which before was strange, stony, hard,

and sick. He began also to pluck up and to destroy, to build and to plant, to freshen the drought within me, to enlighten the darkness, to open the prison-house, to make the crooked straight and the rough places plain, so that my soul could bless the Lord, and all that is within me praise His holy Name."

These insensible visions and vanishings of God in the sphere of prayer, while they wean us from sight to faith, have this further blessing, that they make us independent of circumstances while we pray. Fasting and almsgiving may be done in secret indeed, and yet, as a fact, they are seen of men. The eyes of men often embarrass us in the act. But prayer is more secret. We may pray continually, and be not seen. Everywhere we might pray. Jeremiah prayed in prison: Daniel in the lions' den: Job on the dunghill: the three Children in the fire. Your station in life may force you to feast, while you prefer to fast; and to spend money on yourself, which you would like to give in alms; but neither home nor society can control your prayers, and while you can breathe, you can pray.

Also, whereas in fasting you are occupied with yourself, which is often the barrenest spot on the whole earth for your eyes to rest on; and in almsgiving you

may be engaged with others, who may be not better than yourself; in prayer you ascend to a purer air, you ventilate your thoughts in a serener sphere, and receive God's spirit into your own. You escape from all that is evil in others, you take the wings of the morning and fly from self. Everything, good and evil, is seen in the light of truth, that is, in its relation to God ; and all through your earthly life, dwell where you may, in suffering or in joy, you have the inalienable treasure of the Divine Presence, Emmanuel, God with us.

## CHAPTER V.

## PRAYER.

"Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth."<sup>1</sup> There is something singularly attractive in the simplicity of this man's defence of Christ, who had been recovered from a life-long blindness. There is also a lesson in it humiliating to us, who so often take the name of Jesus upon our lips. The man defended his Saviour first by personal experience: "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see;" next by an argument drawn from spiritual laws, "We know that God heareth not sinners." In these latter words, like Caiaphas, he conveyed a truth beyond his own intention.

I. Prayer is man's due to God; His glory requires

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<sup>1</sup> S. John ix. 31.

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our prayer. It is the worship of the Eternal, man's homage, tribute, devotion to His Majesty.

An error in our language bears testimony to this truth. Our inaccurate use of the word, "devotion" magnifies the office of prayer. This term, strictly speaking, signifies the surrender and inviolable service of the whole life to God, the consecration of our being from end to end, the strong affection which makes the lover "the sole property of the person loved." "No devoted thing that a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he hath shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord."<sup>1</sup> But in ordinary speech we use the word, in a narrower sense, of a pious frame of mind which delights in acts of prayer, even of formal exercises of prayer. Why? Because prayer is the natural and evident expression of the dedication of the whole man to God.

There are degrees in the quality of prayer. Prayer may be valued for its immediate results, "Ask and ye shall have;" as when Abraham prayed and Lot was saved; and Stephen interceded for his enemies, and Saul was converted: or for the moral effects of communion with God. But the highest effort of prayer is

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<sup>1</sup> Levit. xxvii. 28.

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to glorify God. "Te Deum, laudamus." "Thou that hearest the prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come."<sup>1</sup> "Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." Hence prayer is called a *Sacrifice*. "To the soul that prays it is a refuge, to the devil a scourge, to God a sacrifice."

And bearing this in mind, you have an answer for those who contend, that moral virtue and benevolence is a substitute for religious service, or is a religion by itself. Is God a living Person? Has He a loving heart? Then He seeks to be loved. What husband will accept a wife's devotion to his children in the stead of personal affection to Himself? What father's heart will rest delightedly in his sons, who, though they be honest lads and faithful brothers, shall refuse their due of love to him?

Add to this, what has been mentioned in a previous chapter, that prayer is the avenue by which God enters into our soul and converses with it, as it is also the wings by which the soul ascends to Him, and the breath by which heaven is received into us by the Holy Spirit. You will see thus how directly prayer touches the Majesty of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxx. 2.

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Hence it follows that “God heareth not sinners.” This must be defined, for it strikes on the rock upon which the foundations of our life are laid.

True, a man may pray in the effort of one struggling towards the light, as the Eunuch in the chariot, or Cornelius, or Bartimeus who cried to the Son of David, or the woman who was a sinner, ere she was absolved. All such as these may pray and be heard, for all that they are sinners. Nevertheless, this abates not one jot or tittle of the truth, “We know that God heareth not sinners.”

Prayer, such as I speak of, is the devotion of the whole being to God, the worship of the body, and the communing of the soul. It is that of which the Scripture writes, “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”<sup>1</sup> And from this prayer every man is shut out, in that he is a sinner, who is not justified by faith, accepting salvation through the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, and such a sinner God heareth not: such a sinner cannot pray: such a sinner cannot so much as say the child’s prayer, “Our Father.”

But whosoever is justified by Christ, baptized into

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. 10.

Him, penitent, believing, having “receiving the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father”—to whom the Spirit beareth witness with his spirit, that he is the Son of God—that man is not in this sense a sinner; he is free to pray, and God heareth him.

You would be ritualists! So would I! What does the ritualism of the Bible teach us? Why, that in the Jewish tabernacle the Altar of Incense was not approached till the worshipper had passed the Altar, whereon blood was shed in sacrifice for sin. Now the Altar of Incense, signifying the Altar of prayer, was called the Golden Altar, being covered with plates of gold, and stood in an inner spot beyond the Altar of expiation. Also it had a crown of pure gold upon it.<sup>1</sup> On the great Day of Atonement the High Priest, having already shed the blood of the lamb, passed up through the Holy Place to the veil, and beside the veil, only just outside of it, stood the Golden Altar; and from thence he took incense, and the fragrant smoke thereof passed through the veil into the Holiest place, preceding him and penetrating to the Inmost Presence of the Invisible.

Thus also have passed into the Presence of the

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<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxx. 3.

Holiest the intercessions of our High Priest, after He has offered Atonement by His Precious Blood. And thus also, by the new and living way, which He has inaugurated for us, do our prayers, perfumed by the incense of His Intercession, make their way into the presence of the Majesty of God. But—"we know that God heareth not sinners."

I cannot linger on this threshold: but one thing I would ask you. Whether of the two is more likely to be free to pray and to be heard; the man who is in doubt and dimness whether he be justified by Christ; or the man, whose faith has lifted up his eyes to behold his Saviour, and opened his mouth to magnify God's grace in this daily tribute of thanksgiving, "God, I bless Thee that Thou hast saved me by the death of Jesus"? I see no presumption in this confidence, "Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou That dwellest in the heavens;" nor do I see humility in that poverty of faith which suffers its own unworthiness to discredit the merits of the Precious Blood of Christ.

Carrying out this principle, the soul further prepares for prayer by clearing itself, with all its efforts, of those defilements of sin which it contracts after it has been justified. It uses to the utmost the manifold

ordinances which Christ has created in His Church, self-examination, confession, restitution, fasting, alms-giving, and all that goes to make up true repentance, according to the principle laid down by our Blessed Lord the moment before His Institution of the Blessed Sacrament: "He that is bathed needeth not save to sprinkle his feet with water."

There are manifold reasons for men's prayers being hindered: but never let us forget, that the chiefest of these, in the multitudes of persons who haunt our churches, is *unrepented sin*. I verily believe, that if preachers to Sunday morning congregations are bound to do one thing more than another, it is this, to make it intolerable to persons to come and go, as they have been wont, and profess to worship, with unconfessed, unrepented, and unforgiven sins. "We know that God heareth not sinners." Remember David! For nine months, (and during all that time the King was probably not missed from worship on any Sabbath,) he was hard, and never prayed. At last God sent His minister, and David confessed his sin; and *straightway* he went and prayed for seven days and seven nights together! And thou, whosoever thou art that pretendest to pray with a soul ill at ease, "Before thou prayest, prepare thyself, and be not as one that

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tempteth the Lord."<sup>1</sup> " If I incline unto wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Why even Cicero, a man of the world, if ever there was one, tells us how to pray. " Let men approach the Gods in purity: let them hold by piety: let them put away their wealth out of their mind. If any man do otherwise, let God avenge Himself."

II. It is now high time, that we should proceed to consider the resources which Prayer affords in aiding the soul to live a holy life.

First, the difference between one, who attains to holiness, and another who aims beneath it, is determined by the will choosing for each respectively the higher or the lower good.

To a Christian his whole life is full of God. God is in all his thoughts. But just as in the Tabernacle there was a graduated scale of holiness, so is there in the Christian life. God is continually eliciting our love by offering an alternative, a greater or a lesser good; Lot's choice of the plain of Jordan or Abram's contentment to be last; the mountain top or the little Zoar; the selling all and giving to the poor and following Christ with a perfect heart, or the going back to our

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<sup>1</sup> Eccl. xviii. 23.

comforts sad and grieved, remembering, but not loving the call of Christ ; drinking His cup and choosing His Baptism with the sons of Zebedee, or going back to a life, half-Church, half-world, with Demas.

Remember, that evil may be absolute or relative. The will is continually exposed to a choice between a higher and a lower life. The love of God is ever going out in pursuit of us, desiring us. The Spirit is ever moving. The air, we say, is still ; but it is never still. Grace is urging us ; not from behind, but going a little ahead of us. The Good Shepherd goeth before and the sheep follow Him. If Christ walk familiarly by our side, yet He is moving always and making our heart burn within us in the way, so that, being led on, we may see our Lord revealed to us in new modes of life.

Now neither from self nor from any friend can we receive the inspiration of desire to correspond with this Grace of God. If alone, we are likely to choose the lesser good, simply because of the two it is the easier. It is only prayer that lifts us to the contemplation of the greater good. Pray, and you will see distinctly that it is the higher good. Pray long, and you will be enamoured of the sight. Faith says, "It is there." Hope suggests, "It is for me." Love

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detains it, "I will not part with thee, except thou bless me."

Do remember this, that unless you live a life of prayer, you will surely choose the lesser good. Keep this also in mind, that, while frequent *short* prayer has its advantages, specially in educating us in the habit of referring all things to God with devotion, the exercise of *long protracted* prayer enables us to embrace the will of God, and has wondrous power in making the life and love of Jesus pass into our soul. What was the long Agony in the Garden, but a mighty effort of the Son of Mary to choose the higher good? His Will was free. An alternative was presented to it. He chose the best, but not until He had bent His Will, like a bow, in protracted, persevering, exhausting prayer!

Now we must not let this Example go for nought in our daily practice, because it is the perfect life of Jesus! Remember, ere you approach His Passion, that everything in Him is attributed to us except His sinlessness and the atoning merit of His Life. To every one of us, if we be faithful to God, the order of our life moves in the rhythm that determined His, in a sequence of these triplets all through our life,—a call, a sacrifice, a blessing. Has it not been so with us

already? Shall it not be so with us more truly from henceforth to the end, a call, a sacrifice, a blessing? We shall accomplish this by prayer—prayer which informs the soul with intelligence to discern, and with will to choose the best, prayer which ceases not, till it has resolved, “My heart is fixed, O Lord, my heart is fixed.” Looking down to self, to friends, to earth, to reasons that come of prudence, we are entangled with fears, and decline towards the lower choice: and this in many souls is worldliness. But pray, and the will shall rise to choose the best. “Set up thyself, O God, above the heavens, and Thy glory above all the earth. They have laid a net for my feet, and pressed down my soul. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. O God, my heart is ready, my heart is ready: I will sing and give praise with the best member that I have.” No, we must not turn our face of desire even from imitation of the Blessed Virgin nor from the perfect life of Jesus. A spiritual writer has wisely said, “Our cowardice loves to exaggerate the admirable at the expense of the imitable. Alas! if we would but let each day’s grace lead us whither it wills, with its gentle steps, its kind allurement, and its easy sacrifice, in what a sweetly incredible nearness to the world of saints

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should we not find ourselves before many years were gone!"<sup>1</sup>

III. I turn now to an effect of prayer, which contributes in a very high degree to a man's own peace, and, perhaps more than anything, makes him like-minded to God. I mean the *Silence* of prayer.

"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."<sup>2</sup> And our Blessed Lord spake this in connection with the unforgiven sin, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. In one of the most awful scenes of His ministry this thought of idle words came into His mind: and just after, when the tumult had ceased, and His soul longed for rest in sympathy, He turned in thought to those quiet, simple, silent souls, who with few advantages (as we say) live in patient waiting upon His will. "He stretched forth His Hand towards His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of My Father Which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother."<sup>3</sup>

There is a *reverence* in silence towards God, as if

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<sup>1</sup> "Faber's Bethlehem," p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> S. Matt. xii. 36.

<sup>3</sup> S. Matt. xii. 49, 50.

Jesus were sleeping in our soul and resting there, and we would not disturb Him, for all the winds and waves that rave about our head: and in silence there is *deference* towards men, as if we waited on them and preferred them in honour. This silence is the fruit of the lips of prayer. I doubt if any one, steeped in prayer, could offend another by rudeness; or spoil the feast of thoughtful minds and fine spirits, as feasts are often spoiled, by a volubility and vanity of speech.

Again, this silence adorns the soul with the ornament of simplicity and a pure desire. It calms ambition, engages the mind so deeply with the confidences of God, that it loses the old taste for making new connections in the world. Let others take their choice: it will not move a finger to resist their claims. And yet, though such a man "is meek towards all men, yet he is inexorable by men."<sup>1</sup>

Again, in an age of light literature, and smartness of speech affected even by women as much as men, of little parliaments in every tavern and almost every home, of controversies, where all are supposed to know something of everything, imagine the beauty of silence reigning in a soul of prayer. Silence is

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<sup>1</sup> Lord Bacon's "Christian Paradoxes."

conversant with principles. A chatterer deals with fragments of facts. The Man of Prayer is by instinct a philosopher; and where rules end, his genius begins. He sees how long to wait, and the opportunity for action. He knows it is better to suffer doubt in respect of that which is dark, than to contend for that which is uncertain. "Melius est dubitare de occultis quam litigare de incertis." Were there none in the world besides himself, his prayer would be the same, for the sake of his own truth and self-respect and peace. "Lord, take far from me the useless strife of words, and give me the stedfast profession of an unswerving faith."<sup>1</sup> This dignity and wisdom and reserve comes only to the man of prayer.

Hence it is, that many Christians with scant knowledge and a slender outfit make such excellent use of what they have. They pray more than they read, and meditate far more than they talk. Prayer is a wise economist as of time, so of material. Why do many sensible men, speaking in public, make so often vain and foolish speeches? Because, when they rise to speak, they cannot bear the interval of silence: and their volubility makes them say unpremeditated and

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<sup>1</sup> Laud's Prayers, p. 89.

foolish things. Of one, whose brilliant successes in the schools of his University provoked speculation as to his future career, it was said by one who knew him well, "He should put away his books for two years and sit down and think." "No," said another who knew him better, "He would not think—he would only chatter." Prayer is our Master, to correct these inanities, which, even in men of piety and worth, make so much of their life hollow and untrue.

Fluency of speech is a gift popularly envied: and some are weak enough to mistake it for eloquence: but after all it is not better than *small change*. On the other hand, some readers of these pages will remember by the example of a living preacher,<sup>1</sup> how far more eloquent may be the slow utterance and hesitation of a speaker, before whose mind the images of pure thought are being formed like crystals, and whose head is raised in reverent waiting for the tongues of fire to descend upon it, than the most rapid declamation of one, whose mouth is full of words. It is in the school of prayer that this calm eloquence is taught. It is the power that comes forth from the

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<sup>1</sup> The preacher referred to is the writer's first master in the Priesthood, the Rev. T. T. Carter.

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silence of prayer, the effect of God's promise, " My Presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."<sup>1</sup>

Wherever there is prayer, there will be calmness in the heart. Prayer silences ambition, cools the passions, is secure from interference, chastens self-love, quiets that irritable sense of your own faults, which is too querulous to be repentant. Prayer has no disappointments. In business it makes you fervent, and void of curiosity, bidding you " salute no man by the way :" in the severity of God's judgments patient, as, when " there went out fire from the Lord," Aaron the man of eloquence held his peace : in the time of mercy devout, like Hannah, who " spake in her heart : only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard :" in the night of visions lowly and reserved, like Samuel who feared to tell the vision he had seen : in the care for other souls neither anxious nor indifferent, as when Job " rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings," according to the number of all his children.

And when that hour of silence comes, when the soul shall *die alone*, blessed shall we be, if it find us familiar

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<sup>1</sup> *Exod. xxxiii. 14.*

with the silence that comes of prayer. Do you know what death is? You have never seen it. You think you have seen it, but you have not. You fancy you have looked on the face of Death: but it was only his mask. All you saw was the body left behind. You saw not the soul passing through the darkness into another sphere, the loneliness of the soul passing from the world of sense, its silence, the incommunicable burden of its undying life. Oh! if your life has made you dread being alone with God! If your soul be not intimate with Him in prayer, think betimes how you propose to die! and turn to Him now with all your heart, and let Him not depart till He hath blessed you with an answer to this petition, "Lord, teach us to pray."

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## CHAPTER VI.

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### CHRIST AN EXAMPLE OF FASTING, ALMS-GIVING, AND PRAYER.

THE range of the Psalmist's capacity for suffering and joy accounts, as much as anything, for his dominion over our sympathies. The compass of his voice and its penetrating power enabled him to rehearse with singular individuality all the passages, which may be allotted severally to other men, be they composed in what key they may, or let them take their pitch from any note in the scale of life's experience. So filled are the Psalms with the Holy Ghost, that, while they speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance, the multitude, that comes together, is entranced because that every man hears them speak in his own language. But only ONE can interpret the whole music of the Psalms. Only ONE can speak its divers tongues with natural eloquence: and we, when we sing them, feel as if the music were gone out of them, if *Christ* be not in them all in all. Who hath

sounded the depths of their suffering, but He? Who is the model of fasting? Whose charity has embraced mankind with the world-wide sympathy of the Psalms, but *His*, Whose life was impoverished, that He might have alms to make many rich? And Who has risen on their eagle wings and communed with God in that genial confidence, natural only to a man after God's Own Heart, but He, Who in the profoundest sense offered Himself to God from end to end in prayer?

“I am weary of my groaning: every night wash I my bed, and water my couch with my tears. My beauty is gone for very trouble, and worn away because of all mine enemies. Away from me, all ye that work vanity: for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my petition: the Lord will receive my prayer.”

It would be a mechanical account of fasting, alms-giving, and prayer, to consider the bare rule without the life—in a Christian it would be a simply heartless thing, the driest bones of scholastic orthodoxy, to study these conditions of holiness outside the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the living example of those duties.

If any word in these pages has moved you to aspire to a more thorough, complete, and harmonious cha-

racter of the Christian life, the utmost the teacher can do for you is what the Baptist did for S. John and S. Andrew—bid you pass from hence, out of the atmosphere of schools, and preachers, and priests, and systems, and books, to walk with Christ: “And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi, where dwellest Thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.”<sup>1</sup>

I. Think—for this brings us at once into the midst of our present subject—think, how strange a question it is to put to the Homeless One, “Where dwellest Thou?” “Where abidest Thou?” was what the two disciples asked. “Where is Thy mansion?” And it is thought by some, that the inquiry of the two disciples implied a reference to the Glory-Cloud of the Divine Presence, which rested on the Mercy-seat, the witness to Jehovah’s abiding in the dwelling which He loved in Israel. Their question to the Incarnate

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<sup>1</sup> S. John i. 38, 39.

is the yearning of mankind for the presence of Christ in all our homes and ways: the longing to be like-minded to Him: the desire not for any *thing* He has to give, but for companionship and peace with Him. He asks “*What seek ye?*” simply to prove them; as when He pressed Peter with the question, “*Lovest Thou Me?*” And they answer, just as He intended they should answer, “*What seek ye? We know not what! Nothing whatsoever! Thee we seek! Where dwellest Thou?*”

And so with us. We do not seek the gift we can get by fasting, almsgiving, or prayer. The form, the rule, the act, the exercise, will not content us. But we seek the mind which is in Christ Jesus: we would dwell with Him, have Him to be our Friend, in our home, in our work, in our play. We would be like Him, in character, in life, grow up into His stature, have Him formed in us, become Christ-like by grace, as in grace He became Man-like.

To the inquiry of yearning hearts, “*Where dwellest Thou?*” He answers—He, the Homeless One, setting no limit to the space where He may be found—“*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*” And shall not this go forth from our hearts, quick and straight as an arrow from the

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cord of a strong will, “ O send out Thy light and Thy truth, that they may lead me: and bring me unto Thy holy hill and Thy dwelling ” ?

The Homeless One ! Ye, who are wrapped up in your homes, listen to Him, how He denied Himself a home. “ The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His Head.” Your Lord fasted from His Birth, fasted from the natural comforts of a home ! Think of the patient discipline of the life of Jesus. You would not have expected it. You would have thought, that, had he chosen to be content with the Word being made Flesh, and with appearing in that spotless Body as a passing vision before men—had He chosen to die in a moment, anywhere, in any mode, His Perfect Atonement would have been infinite, and His wish complete. One Hand of His stretched out to humanity in the Person of our Brother would have saved mankind ! But no ! As a fact, He chose deliberately to live a life of discipline, of incessant habits of unremitting duty to Himself, His brethren, and God.

The abstinence of Jesus exceeds our most patient energy to explore ; and His charity to others and devotion to the Father are inveterately involved in

the denial of Self. Have you ever given yourself leisure to meditate on this word in the Philippians, ii. 7, "He *emptied Himself*"? It is the extremity of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer! We fast, to empty self of all that is hindering us within, sensuality, pride, softness, intellectualism, self-will. We give alms, to empty self of all the attractions of the world; and, till we have done as much, we cannot pray to have our will translated into the will of God, nor enter into God's mind. We know not what God, our loving Father, wills for us, unless first we be emptied of all wishes of our own.

“ I wish to have no wishes left,  
But to leave all to Thee :  
And yet I wish that Thou should'st will  
Things that I wish to be ! ”

That “ *and yet* ” clips one of the wings of prayer!  
But Christ emptied Himself, and so He prayed.

The Godhead is fulness: humanity emptiness. God is self-contained, sufficient to Himself. Man is dependent, having nothing in himself. Christ came out of the fulness of the Godhead; never separating Himself indeed from Its Presence, but refusing to enjoy the fruits of It. By a motive mightier even than the joy, which He had with the Father in His Own Glory from eternity, He constrained Himself to withdraw

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from the enjoyment of His own nature. He fasted, not from the society of Angels only, nor from the partaking of the glory of the Father only, but He fasted from the taste of the sweetness of His Own Nature, which excelled by infinite degrees the beauty of Angelic life.

Again, He submitted to abstinence from communion on equal terms with the Holy Spirit: for you will remember how our Blessed Lord is described as receiving the Spirit as a *gift*, not a natural prerogative (as His Eternal generation never ceased to be)—“God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him,”<sup>1</sup> “As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.”<sup>2</sup> Christ is said to submit His free will to the counsel of the Spirit. He is “led up of the Spirit;” nay, the “Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness.”<sup>3</sup>

Think of the painfulness of your efforts to give up your will to a superior, or to an equal; to be led and cease to lead—or to be driven and not led! Nine times out of ten you assert your manhood, you resent the driving, and resist. And when you conquer yourself, you know it is bitter *fasting* from meat sweeter to

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<sup>1</sup> S. John iii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. v. 26.

<sup>3</sup> S. Mark i. 12.

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your taste than bread : for your nature has not arrived at this grace, " My meat is to do the Will of Him that sent Me."

Behold then the extremity and rigour of abstinence in Jesus, so emptying Himself, that the Tempter found in Him no fuel, wherewith to raise a flame of sin : " The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me."<sup>1</sup>

Remember also His exhaustion, which involved the necessity of an Angel's ministry, the creature of His own Hands : also the partial ignorance of the Day of the Lord, to which he subjected the infinite capacity of His Mind : how He negatived goodness in Himself in comparison of the Father, " Why callest thou Me good ? There is none good but One, that is, God."<sup>2</sup>

Next, consider how every state in human life was open to His choice, and how, had He elected to be great, prophecy would have justified His greatness : but think, what it was he chose ! Age and piety have changed the aspect of His lot, adding the " consecration and the poet's dream." But let not poetry so

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<sup>1</sup> S. John xiv. 30.

<sup>2</sup> S. Matt. xix. 17; cf. also Ephes. i. 5; Col. i. 19; Phil. ii. 9. S. John viii. 29.

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decorate the Cross with gems, as to hide the wood of the bitter Tree ! We know how a stable may be made a shrine, and an Altar be built up from a grave. But to know how Jesus fasted, throw back your imagination to Bethlehem and Calvary, before the night when Mary laid down her blessed Burden, and Joseph set a few lengths of straw upon a stone to serve as a pillow for the Infant's Head. That manger of brute cattle we have only seen in pictures, or transfigured in the light of our children's adoring faces, "whose eyes are homes of silent prayer :" and the Carpenter's shop at Nazareth, and the Upper Room lent in charity by that poor man, who had no servant to fetch him water from the well, and the rough wood of the malefactor's Cross, which the Cyrenian bore to Calvary, (whereon one stain of a single drop of the Precious Blood was worth the ransom of the world !)—all these are beyond imagination lovely in our eyes to-day ; but to know them as they were in fact, when Jesus chose them for His penance in satisfaction for our luxuries, we must see them in their nakedness.

We wonder often why the poor shall never cease out of the world. Anyhow, whatever other reasons there may be for poverty, this is one : to warn us, who are

not poor, what hardship Christ espoused, when He chose to be born, and live, and die in poverty. The good things of life were spread for Him in the world. Angels would have waited at the board; but He passed them by, and would not touch them. Nothing should allure Him to be rich.

IV. But there was no more fasting in this than alms-giving. He became poor that He might make many rich. "Such were His riches," says Augustine, "such His poverty; riches that you might be created, poverty that you might be redeemed." If so poor as to be beholden to another, it was, that He might give, in receiving, more than He received; as when He asked the woman for a drink of water, and He gave her the well-spring of eternal life; and on the Cross He thirsted for us, that in the multitude of our sorrows His comforts might refresh our soul. Had Jesus fasted less, His charity would have had less to give. But now the Psalmist speaketh for Him thus: "O praise the Lord Which dwelleth in Sion: shew the people of His doings. For when He maketh inquisition for blood, He remembereth them, and forgetteth not the complaint of the poor. The poor shall not always be forgotten: the patient abiding of the meek shall not perish for ever. Arise, O Lord God, and lift up Thine

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Hand : forget not the poor. Lord, Thou, hast heard the desire of the poor. Thou preparest their heart, and Thine ear hearkeneth thereto. To help the fatherless and poor unto their right, that the man of the earth be no more exalted against them."

We might linger all day on the Poverty of the Birth of Christ. It brings us back with such plain severity to God's view of the comparative greatness and littleness of human life ; what the truth of life is ; and what is the mistake of life. It reduces us to cool calm thoughts of Christ's deliberate preference amidst the many choices in the world. Before His Human Eyes had ever seen the earth, He elected to be poor. At the age " before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good," as the prophet describes Him in His human discretion, our Master determined to deny Himself the luxury of wealth. And if there be reality in the Christ-like life at all, shall not this thought furnish us with a rule of fasting and almsgiving to regulate our homes ?

O Blessed Jesus, art Thou indeed the way, the truth, and the life ? or is it a dream that we can be like Thee in our modern homes ? Tell us, which of the two is the mistake. Is it a mistake to try to follow Thee ? or is it that our life, not following Thee, is one long mis-

take? Thou, my Saviour, hadst not where to lay Thy Head, but first in the Virgin's womb, then in the manger of brute cattle, then on the deck of a common boat, then on the Cross, then in the cold grave, a grave lent Thee by a friend!

Again, let us look at another instance of the abstinence and charity of our Blessed Lord. We, who flock to London, whose hearts are in the great centres of English life, who live in an age, when a home in a common country-town is a thing to be despised, let us think of the rule of fasting and love, which Jesus practised for eighteen years in the country-town of Nazareth. *Village* of Nazareth, you might prefer to call it! That is a more sentimental word, more poetical: but I am speaking of facts, and the prosaic virtues of real life. In the country-town of Nazareth Jesus elected to live from twelve years old to thirty. Have you ever stayed to meditate on this abstinence of His? Why did He prefer the narrow lanes of Nazareth, the rustic habits of the native people, the vulgarity and prejudices of contracted minds, a society "walking in darkness," as the prophet Isaiah had foretold, to the Temple slopes confronting the Mount of Olives, and the busy highways of Jerusalem? Why did He suffer Barnabas to enjoy his landed estate in Cyprus, and

Paul the culture of men of letters and philosophy in Tarsus, and He to pass His youth and early manhood as a despised Nazarene? Conscious of His capacity to teach, rebuke, invigorate, and command, He deliberately put Himself under the yoke of filial obedience to Mary and the Carpenter, her husband, in a lowly village in the north, when Jewry and Samaria lay open to His eloquence. What rigid abstinence in fasting from the brilliant exercise of gifts, the delight of influence, the praise of men, the quick consummation of a noble work, the glory of casting down the false and lifting up the true, the contradiction of the wrong and the triumph of the right! But He was deaf to these provocations to an ambitious life. His brethren said unto Him, "Depart hence and go into Judea, that Thy disciples also may see the works that Thou doest. If Thou do these things, shew Thyself to the world." Then Jesus said unto them, "Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast, for My time is not yet full come."<sup>1</sup>

V. Now, it would be to lose the doctrine of self-discipline, to say that our Blessed Saviour fasted *only* that He might have bread to break more richly for the

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<sup>1</sup> S. John vii. 3, 4, 6, 8.

poor. He knew the virtue of the energy besides the value of the result. But, as a fact, His fasting did contribute to the wealth of others : just as His work for others gave Him somewhat besides Himself to offer unto God. "I have glorified Thee on the earth : I have finished the work, which Thou gavest Me to do : and now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine Own Self."

It is a legitimate refreshment to the Christian in his enduring the hardness of self-discipline, to know that thereby he is acquiring spiritual power, wherewith to bless the souls of other men. He will remember that the Divine Master fasted, before He won the Samaritan sensualist from her vice, and cleared her intelligence to grasp the truth of a spiritual religion. He showed His charity no less, when He feasted, that He might draw the Magdalene in contrition to His Feet.

He begged the loan of a room from a stranger on the way, that He might leave a consecrated Altar as a legacy in his house. He sat down to rest, and began to eat, that those, who wanted Him, might find Him on the spot. He left His bread unbroken on the board, that He might go forth and heal the sick.

In charity He denied Himself the bliss of heaven,

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and passed into the wilderness to look upon the face of hell. He went down to Bethesda, the noisome hospital, to recover the sick, and to the loathsome grave to raise the dead.

He left Nicodemus, the gentleman and scholar, to the patient teaching of the Holy Spirit, and chose for His disciples the fishermen so dull of understanding.

He resigned the beautiful holiness of the Blessed Virgin to converse for three years with the hateful heart of Judas.

He used silence towards those whose damnation would have been hastened by His words: and moved His parched lips to pray aloud for those, whose horrid task of nailing Him to the Cross suffered them not to reflect and pray for themselves.

In His Resurrection He denied Himself a triumph over His enemies, and preferred to console the faith of the few who still believed.

How often have we heard these things! And still “the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”<sup>1</sup>

This is oftentimes the argument we use. We say, Christ’s lowly and despised life cannot be reproduced.

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<sup>1</sup> Jer. viii. 20.

The circumstances of modern life have created a revolution in Christian practice. It is the extreme of folly to interpret the counsels of the Holy Gospels literally. What remains within our power of imitation is something more noble, more pleasing to God. We must cultivate the inward habit of humility and unselfishness and charity, and thus the same *principle* will rule our life !

True ! but do we not go on to reason out the matter thus ? “ I will retain the reputation I have now. I will enjoy the prizes of life that are set before me in my present lot : but thus engaged, I will strive for the mortification of a sensual or ambitious habit, and shall expect to gather the same spiritual fruits of this interior discipline, which would be mine in circumstances more like those, which Christ created around His earthly life.”

I doubt, if this will in most cases satisfy the claims of the Holy Spirit, Who comes forth to win us to a perfect union with Christ Jesus. I doubt if any one, being thus content to interpret the Holy Gospels, will attain to the possession of the character he imagines. Will *anything* recover in us the image of the character of our dear Lord, short of a courage which has the heart to confront, and in *will* thoroughly to embrace

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the very same hardness of material circumstances (should He decree to ordain our vocation thus) which He literally bids those, who would closely follow Him, to bear.

VI. But the hour is passing from our hands. The stream of life is gliding past, and bearing us on, where there is no need to fast, and no poor to bless ; for all will be pure, and all will be rich in Jesus Christ. Here that worship must begin, which will be perfected behind the veil : and even, were this life all, we should be only half-educated without prayer.

Prayer has a power of tranquillity, a patience, a wisdom, and a silence, which makes the pauses in the strife of earth intervals of a life in heaven. Prayer is the imperfect crescent of the moon laid against a dark background of shifting cloud.

“ Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night,  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear !”

We should obediently cultivate the power of prayer even though the forms of worship were depraved ; as the Blessed Virgin took her Child into the Temple on the feast day of the Law. The hindrances of prayer are great : but how good is God ! Christ trains us by degrees—to watch with Him one hour—then for a few days to wait for the promise of the Father. And

if we miss the opportunities of shorter prayer we shall lose the ability to pray. Thus did the Jews, who rejected Christ in His lesser works of healing, deny Him in His greatest work of Atonement on the Cross.

If we would pray, we must prepare ourselves, as Christ, by fasting and alms. What He lost in them, He gained in prayer; for while He prayed, He was transfigured! And so will it be with those who follow Him. If our prayers have less force to transform us, the reason may be, that we have been negligent of fasting, and poor in almsgiving. Those rules we have thought to be arbitrary directions of a society of men, instead of being a moral necessity in the Church of Christ. Those exercises were the materials, of which the structure of Christ's life was built: but we have despised them, thinking that the Church in her rule of fasting and almsgiving was giving us brick for stone, and slime for mortar. But the end of these, by a Divine decree, is to make us like unto Him, Who offered Himself without spot to God.

We came from God; we return to God. Our life meanwhile is an offering to God. We are offered to Him in our Baptism by others, in Confirmation by our own will. In every Eucharist the oblation is renewed: in marriage; in the commencement of every work; in

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failure or success; in every call; in espousing our vocation; in bereavements which come without or against our will; in every choice, when Jesus with a certain hardness presses us to declare ourselves, and we have liberty to elect the casket of gold, or silver, or lead, and with the poverty of Christ in this life in our mind and our wealth with Him in heaven for ever, our will at last determines for present loss and eternal gain.

And hereafter, when the end comes which is the beginning of a new life, what will be the entrance into heaven but being offered afresh to God in and by His dear Son? And *then* we must be offered without spot! Spotless we shall be, if we be found in Him at the last, for the raiment of His righteousness will clothe us to the feet.

But what Christ does for us sacramentally, we should strive to do, so far as by grace is possible, in our life and person and by our own will preferring holiness. By integrity of the body, by purity of the affections, by humility of the spirit, you should empty yourself of all that hinders the possession of your whole being by Christ: and this you will accomplish by fasting. You should be like-minded to Him in loving all He loves and hating all He hates, and this

you will achieve by charity. Then, and then only, shall you turn your face unveiled towards Him and gaze upon Him, reflecting also, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord ; and transformed, as you enter into the bright cloud of prayer, you will ascend nearer to the Golden Altar beside the Veil, and passing into the Holiest, Christ shall present you in Himself without spot to God.



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